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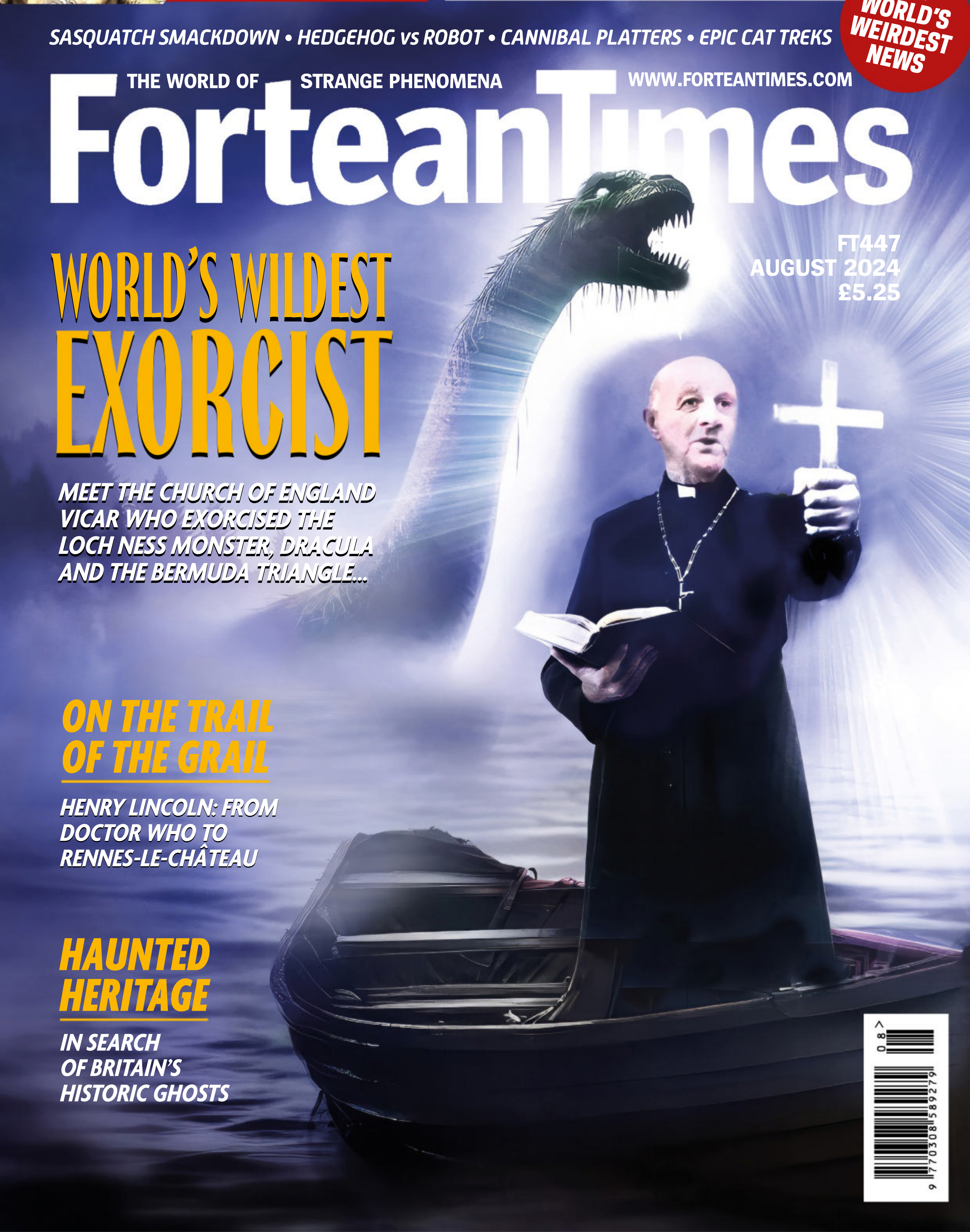

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For years, research into Russia's hairy hominids was frowned upon by the Soviet authorities, but now all that has changed, as EDWARD CRABTREE reports from the Russian Federation, where an appetite for the unexplained has seen the yeti's rehabilitation.

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What exactly was 'Trunko', the bizarre creature washed ashore on the South African coast in 1924 after a battle with a pair of killer whales? DR KARL SHUKER solves a cryptozoological puzzle and provides an identity for this white-furred, proboscis-endowed sea monster.

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A giant poisonous worm that lives beneath the sands of the Gobi and can kill with the power of electricity can surely only be the stuff of legend or B-movies. Or can it? ADAM DAVIES sets off into the desert wastes on a quest for the Mongolian Death Worm.

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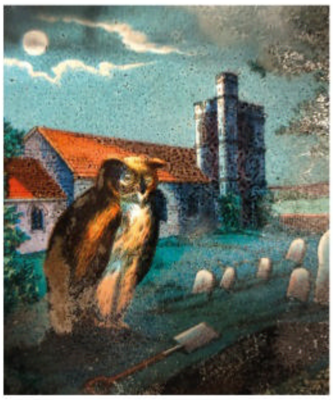

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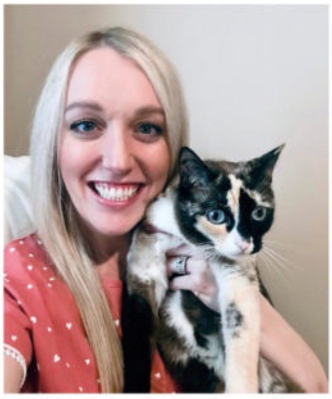

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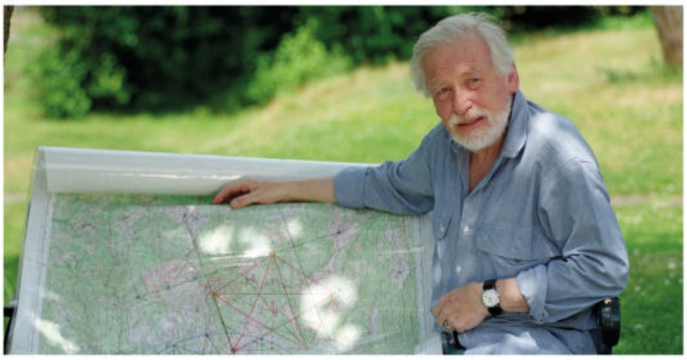

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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Calvine UFO update, occult crimewave, cannibal round-up and much more...

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If one writer made alternative history mainstream it was Henry Lincoln, who put Rennes-le-Château on the map, co-wrote *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and inspired Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. **LYNN PICKNETT & CLIVE PRINCE** celebrate the life and career of a playful and influential trailblazer.

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ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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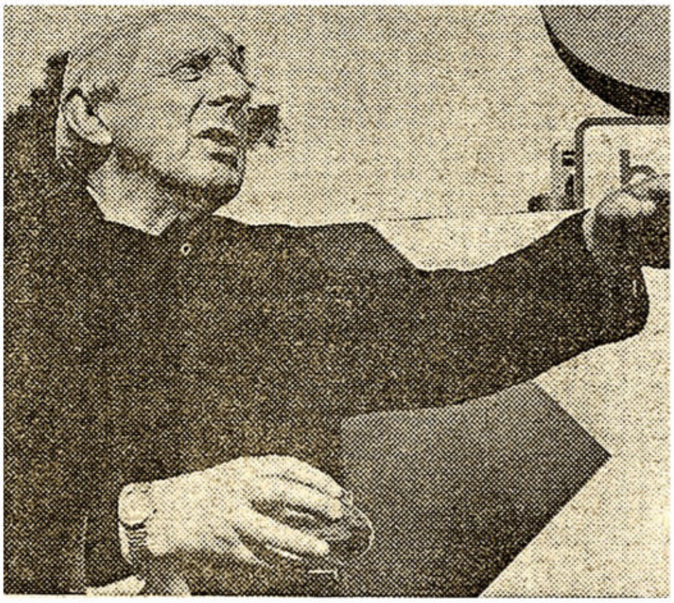
EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



DEVILS IN DISGUISE

Dr Donald Omand, the Church of England vicar who in 1973 famously attempted to exorcise Loch Ness, has put in only fleeting appearances in these pages over the years, so we're particularly pleased to present – at long last – a full-length article (p.30) from fellow man of the cloth Rev Peter Laws detailing the incredibly strange career of this eccentric Anglican. Omand squared his religious convictions with a belief in second sight, genuine vampirism and the power of evil to taint and take over not just people, but places too. It was this notion that saw him attempting to use the power of Christ to banish demons from a stretch of Yorkshire coastline, Loch Ness and, eventually, the 'Bermuda Triangle', not to mention a good number of accident black spots on Britain's roads (as in the newspaper clipping seen above). Whether Donald succeeded in vanquishing devils and bringing peace to souls in torment it's hard to say for sure, but he fought the good fight over many decades in a career that took him from a Berlin circus to Bermuda's Horseshoe Bay, providing wonderful material for the newspapers in the process.

Some exorcisms prove not just unsuccessful but fatal – see our report into a highly disturbing incident in Italy, on p.8. And some films about exorcisms, says reviewer Leyla Mikelsen, should be sent back to the production purgatory whence they emerged; see p.58 for a hellish review of Russell Crowe's latest 'religious horror' movie.

Meanwhile, says SD Tucker, demons – or possibly evil extraterrestrial entities – may be lurking in our new technology: is Chat-GPT simply biding its time before revealing itself as the human-sacrifice-hungry Moloch of the ancient Middle East? Did dolphin-fancier John C Lilly (and his sidekick The Penguin) see this all coming back in the 1960s in an acid-drenched epiphany? Find the answers to these and other mind-boggling questiond on p.38.

Is it too late to save ourselves from the dark forces we have unleashed? Perhaps, but the recent Summer Solstice, according to 'new Nostradmus' Kushal Kumar, heralded the first stirrings of WWIII (in a cloud of orange paint over Stonehenge, courtesy of Just Stop Oil; see Noel Rooney's Conspirasphere column on p.20), so if the demons don't get you, the Russians will.

ERRATA

FT443:23: It's rare that our resident mythbuster slips up, but Mat Coward's Mythconceptions column about Hadrian's Wall contained a geographical blunder of epic proportions that left readers scratching their heads and offering some amusing comments. Mark O'Kane (of 'Newcastle upon Hadrian's Wall') wrote in to say: "As someone who has lived in two different houses built upon the exact line of Hadrian's wall, I was bemused to read that "the formal boundary between England and Wales has varied over time, but it has never touched the wall". Hadrian's Wall is nowhere near Wales, unless of course there have been recent discoveries made, of which I am unaware." Andy Birkin, though, saw a silver lining: "Many thanks for clearing up my belief that crossing the wall was a short cut to Swansea avoiding any toll charges. This should greatly reduce my journey time to see my great aunt." Thanks too to Ruth Summersides and the various X/Twitter users who pointed out this error.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

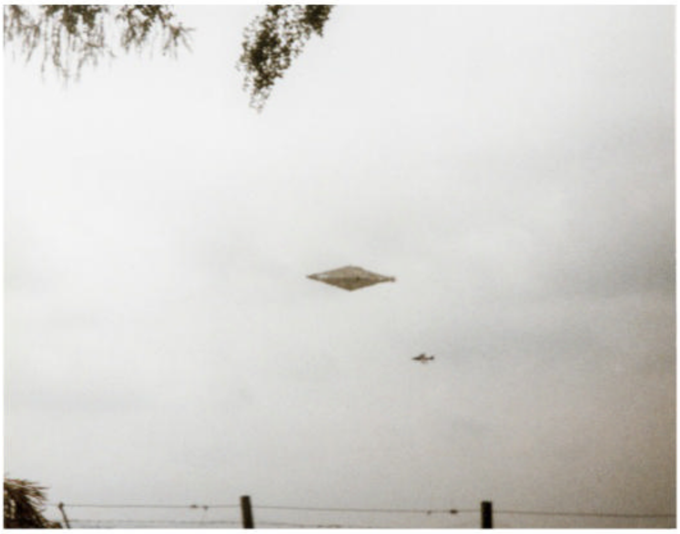
UFO PHOTO UPDATE

DAVID CLARKE uncovers new evidence, but the truth about the Calvine photo remains elusive

New evidence has emerged about the photos of a UFO shadowed by a Harrier jet over Scotland from a friend of the two witnesses. Retired chef Richard Grieve claims he worked alongside the two young men who saw and photographed the diamond-shaped object north of Pitlochry one night in August 1990 (**FT423:30-35**). Grieve first came forward in July 2022, when he contacted ufologist Philip Mantle by email. He told Philip: "The two people who took the photograph were chefs at Fishers Hotel in Pitlochry… I know this to be true as I worked in the hotel at the same time."

This was significant because the link between the photographer and a hotel in the town was not in the public domain at that time. Before then, stories about them had referred to them as hikers or poachers. Their identification as kitchen workers in a hotel did not emerge until 13 August 2022 when I published Craig Lindsay's account of the Calvine incident in the *Daily Mail*. In that story, former RAF Press Officer Lindsay revealed how, after receiving a copy of one print from a set of six, from the *Daily Record*, he spoke on the phone to someone who was temporarily employed at a hotel in Pitlochry. Craig believed this was the Atholl Palace on the outskirts of the Perthshire town. This person provided the account of how he and a friend saw and photographed the diamond-shaped UFO, circled by military jets.

Grieve, now 55, says he worked alongside two men, one a breakfast chef and the other a vegetable chef, for 10 months shortly before his 21st birthday in the summer of 1990.



SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The hotel received a visit from three men who arrived by car one evening

Interviewed for my follow-up article in the *Daily Mail* (7 June 2024) he recalls how the two friends delivered their photos to the newspaper in Glasgow soon after their experience in August 1990. Shortly after that, Fishers Hotel received a visit from three men who arrived by car one stormy evening. Two of the men, who said they were from the Royal Navy, questioned the chefs about the photographs. Afterwards, Grieve says, the pair were visibly shaken and "not long after that it all went a bit hush-hush and they started talking about being followed around Pitlochry."

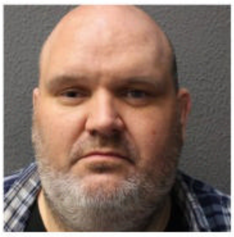
He told me: "Their demeanour changed. They stopped turning up for work, went off the rails and one began drinking heavily. The other, who was usually outgoing and larger than life, became introverted and sullen."

Grieve says that not long after this both left their jobs at the hotel. He has had no contact with them since and is keen to find out what happened to them. He made the link between this unexplained episode and the Calvine UFO legend when he read some of the sensational stories published in the tabloids following a Channel 5 reconstruction of the Calvine incident during 2015.

Despite an intensive two-year investigation since I released the only surviving original image of the now famous Calvine UFO, no one has come forward to claim they are the photographer. In addition, mystery continues to surround the identity of Kevin Russell, whose name was written on the back of the print sent by the *Daily Record* to RAF Pitreavie in August 1990. Richard Grieve does recall the first names of his friends who took the photographs, but neither of them was called Kevin Russell. Since 2022 I have been working with colleagues to trace Kevin Russell who, according to the caption written by the Record photographers, is the copyright holder. But despite tracing some 140 Kevin Russells of the correct age, both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK and abroad, none of them has admitted to being the photographer.

Our ongoing investigation of the mystery has now produced proof that the Calvine photograph is one of the original six images analysed by the Ministry of Defence in 1990. My Sheffield Hallam colleague, photography specialist and lecturer Andrew Robinson, has carried out a detailed computer analysis of the image donated to the University Library Special Collections by Craig Lindsay in 2022. He is confident this is the same image as the one faxed to the Sec(AS) UFO desk in 1990 (these and the envelope in which they arrived formed part of the donation by Craig). Andrew also confirmed this image is the same as the 'vu-foil' photocopies released by The National Archives in 2009 (TNA DEFE 31/180/1). Andrew concludes: "The print donated by Craig is without doubt a copy of the original Calvine photograph. All my analysis suggests that this is a genuine photograph of a scene in front of camera, and that if any construction or manipulation has taken place, this has occurred in front of the camera rather than in post-production. However, there are no visible signs of any such construction."

Since the Calvine image was published in 2022, there has been much debate online about potential theories and explanations. Many dismiss the photo as a hoax or prank. By far



MEAT IS MURDER

Eunuch Maker jailed and other cannibal news

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The late, great Roger Corman remembered

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SHADES OF GREY

One woman's lifetime of alien experiences

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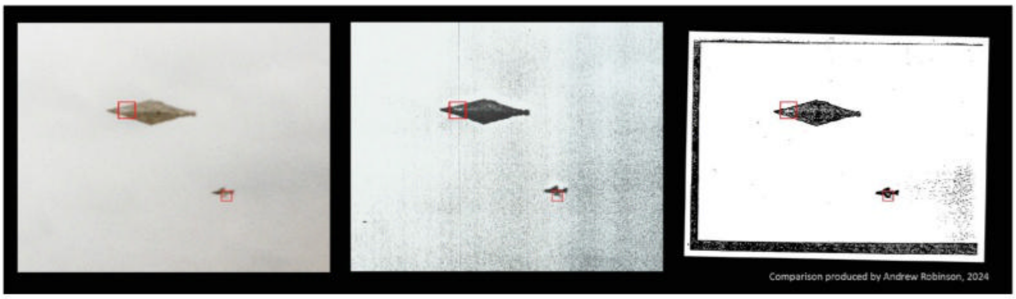


ANDREW ROBINSON

ABOVE: Andrew Robinson's comparison of the original Calvine image (left) with the photocopy from RAF Pitreavie (centre) and the photocopy released by The National Archives in March 2009 (right). **BELOW**: David Clarke trying to replicate the theory that the UFO is a hanging Christmas tree ornament in front of a live audience at Sheffield Hallam last year.

DAVID CLARKE

the most popular idea, judging by the quantity of responses to my latest *Daily Mail* article, is the 'rock in the pond' theory. This suggests the image does not show an object in a cloudy sky but is actually an upside-down photograph of a loch or pond. The diamond-shaped UFO is an island or a rock that protrudes from the still water and the jet aircraft is either a bird or a person in a rowing boat. An excellent recent 3D computer analysis of the Calvine image by @ThomasH_Synth, available on YouTube, sceptically examines the pond reflection theory. The Danish researcher concludes it is technically possible, but less likely than it being a real photo of an object in the sky, as described in the original account.

The second most popular theory suggests the UFO is a small object suspended close to the camera on a thin wire from one of the over-hanging trees, possibly a five-pointed Christmas tree ornament identified by Belgian sceptic Wim van Utrecht. The Harrier is a model suspended on a fishing rod, manœuvred around the model by one of the pranksters. This, in my view, is more likely than the 'rock in the pond', and, if true, would not be the first UFO image faked by suspending small objects from a thin wire.

Those who propose these theories are all convinced they have 'solved' the mystery. But they cannot *all* have solved it, as the theories are mutually contradictory: the UFO cannot be both a reflection of a rock and a dangling ornament. Andrew Robinson reflects that "many of these suggestions are simply implausible. Even those that might be plausible create more problems than they solve. The simplest explanation, that we are seeing a photograph of a real object in the sky, is by far the most convincing."

But what kind of 'real object' could it be? Sceptic Mick West has suggested the UFO could be something quite ordinary such as a hovering kite or perhaps a balloon or airship. But this and the other theories do not satisfactorily explain the presence in at least four of the six images of the aircraft. Analysis of the original six colour images by MoD specialists "established that the jet aircraft is a Harrier… and also identified a barely visible second aircraft, again probably a Harrier" (TNA DEFE 24/1940/1). The source of these aircraft remains a mystery, as according to the MoD briefing there were none operating in Scotland at the time and date. But I was informed by a former defence intelligence official that further inquiries revealed the two jets were US and UK aircraft that were "escorting the object".

Craig Lindsay and I agree there are only two options. Either the photographs are a clever hoax perpetrated by persons unknown; or the photographer captured on film some kind of military technology they should not have seen. If the latter is true, then what was it?

Richard Greave told me: "I worked with these two lads for 10 months and I believed what they told me. It was not a hoax and I would happily testify in court to that effect. Whatever it was, they knew there were not meant to see it. They never really talked about it, but one of them said: 'It was the Americans'."

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

WOMAN IN COMA JUMPED FROM CAR

Gold Coast Bulletin,
23 Sept 2023.

Vintage stuffed fish at heart of £6.8m family court fight

Salisbury Journal, 2 Nov 2023.

BOSS ATTACKS HIS TERRIFIED WIFE WITH A PACKET OF SAUSAGE ROLLS

Daily Mail, 5 Jan 2024.

How ants persuaded lions to eat buffalo

Economist, 27 Jan 2024

KARL MARX WINS STOCKPORT SEAT FOR LABOUR

Daily Telegraph, 3 May 2024.

Scarborough woman wants answers after being told she is dead

BBC News, 30 April 2024.

SIDELINES

BERRY GOOD

A blueberry picked on 13 November 2023 has made it to the Guinness Book of Records by tipping the scales at an impressive 20.4g (0.71oz) and measuring 39.31mm (1.55in) across, making it almost as large as a tennis ball. Grown in Corindi, New South Wales, Australia, by blueberry growers the Costa Group, the monster comfortably beat the existing record of 16.2g (0.57oz) held by another Australian berry since 2020. "This really is a delightful piece of fruit," said horticulturalist Brad Hocking. *editions.cnn.com, 15 Mar 2024.*

SNEAKY GIBBON

Zookeepers at Kujukushima Zoo in Sasebo City, Japan, were completely baffled when Momo, one of their lar gibbons, gave birth, despite living in an enclosure with no males present. Once they could perform DNA tests on the offspring, they realised the father was Itou, a male living in an adjacent enclosure who had managed to mate with Momo through a perforated board between the pens that had holes less than 9 millimeters (0.35 inches) in diameter. They have now replaced the board with a solid steel plate. *UPI.com, 3 Feb 2023.*

HEDGEHOG VS ROBOT

Dr Sophie Lund Rasmussen of the Wildlife Conservation Unit at the University of Oxford has developed a facial recognition programme intended to stop robot lawnmowers running over hedgehogs. Testing 19 types of robotic mowers with hedgehog crash test dummies, Rasmussen found that the animals are at greater risk than when humans are behind the mower because, while humans are likely to notice a hedgehog, existing robotic technology often misses them. She hopes that manufacturers will adopt her innovation to create hedgehog friendly lawnmowers. *Sunday Telegraph, 21 Jan 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

EPIC CAT TREKS

Some adventurous moggies boldly go where no cat has gone before...

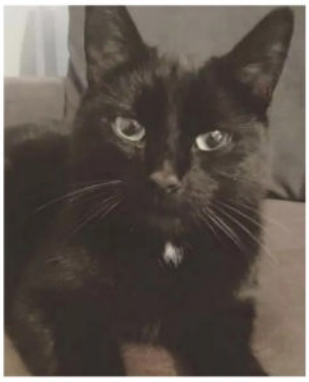
TIERARZTPRAXIS DR HÄRTING / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Milo reunited with Marlijn de Wal and husband Willie by vet Johannes Härting and wife Sabine. **BELOW**: Dexter.

ORKNEY ODYSSEY

When their cat Dexter vanished from their home in Ledbury, Hertfordshire, Geoff and Shannon Smith spent weeks searching the town for her, but with no luck. Four months later they got a call from a vet in Orkney, more than 600 miles (966km) away, who had scanned a stray's microchip and identified her as Dexter. A local woman had discovered Dexter living in her lambing shed and taken her in to be checked. The Smiths have no idea how Dexter could have made her way to the Orkney Isles but speculate that she might have hitched a ride with a travelling fair. They were hoping to make the trip to retrieve her, but said "We're looking at ways to get there, but it's a lot of money. She's staying with the lady and eating haggis, she's super happy." *Sun, 12 Feb 2023.*

Four months later they got a call from a vet 600 miles away



MILO'S MILES

Marlijn de Wal from Veendam in the Netherlands grew concerned after her three-year-old tabby cat Milo had not come home for several hours. He usually "shows up almost every hour and demands a lot of attention," she said, adding "I am always a bit overprotective and thought that with this cold weather Milo should have come home by now," so reported him missing. She set up a dedicated Facebook page to publicise Milo's disappearance, put up "Missing" posters, and scoured local woods. After three sleepless nights of worry, she got a phone call from a vet saying that Milo had been found seriously injured on a busy road junction, but not locally – he was 530 miles (853km) away in Reutte, Austria. "It's a bizarre story," said de Wal, who believes that she has worked out how Milo ended up in Austria. "I spoke to someone who drove a company van with a trailer from Veendam to Austria and made a short stopover in Reutte," she said. Vet Johannes Härting took Milo in and although the unfortunate cat was found in a "critical" condition, he made a swift recovery and was reunited with de Wal, who described the result as a "happy ending". *Times, 2 Dec 2023.*

JASMINE ON THE ROAD

Hitching an even longer ride was Jasmine, an eight-year-old Siamese cat from Weston-super-Mare. Jasmine survived a three-day, 800-mile (1,287km) tour of south-west England and Wales in the engine of a delivery van. Her owner, Laura Teale, grew concerned when Jasmine failed to come home and started to put up posters and distribute leaflets. Three days later, she was phoned by a vet from Devon who had identified Jasmine via her

CARRIE CLARK / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Galena, clearly haunted by her Amazon ordeal. **BELOW**: Siamese hitchhiker Jasmine and van driver Jeff Boorer, who unwittingly took her on an 800-mile trip.

microchip. Van driver Jeff Boorer had opened his van bonnet to top up the wiper fluid and discovered her curled up next to the battery. "I just find it incredible," he said. "She is such a beautiful cat. She didn't seem to be scared; she was pretty chill." Boorer rescued Jasmine and took her to a vet, where she was found to be dehydrated, but otherwise fine. In the three days since Boorer had left Weston-super-Mare, he had driven 800 miles around the southwest and across the Welsh border to Llanelli. "She is quite shy, so it was unusual for her to go so far," said Teale, who was overjoyed to get Jasmine back. "I was very relieved," she said. "I have had her since she was a kitten, before I met my partner. She is my fur baby." *BBC News, 13 Jan 2024.*

CAT IN THE BOX

A different method of stowing away was chosen by Galena, a calico cat from Utah. Nearly a week after going missing she was discovered in California when an Amazon warehouse worker opened a package containing a pair of steel-toed work boots that Galena's owners were returning. She had sneaked into the package undetected and been posted back along with the footwear. When found, Galena was in good health despite not having had food or water for several days; luckily one of the box's seams had been open so there was air to breathe, and the weather had been mild, so she had not frozen or overheated. Amazon staff took the cat to a vet who contacted Clark after checking her chip. "I didn't believe her [the vet] at first and thought it was a prank," said Galena's owner, Carrie Clark, but once the vet had explained what happened she said it was "most amazing, insane news in the entire world", adding that "Galena loves boxes, it's just part of her personality." Clark and her husband then flew more than 1,000 miles (1,609km) to California to bring their cat home. "It was an amazing reunion! Galena instantly stopped shaking and relaxed in my arms when I got to hold her again," she said, adding that she encouraged everyone to microchip their pets and to "triple check" their Amazon boxes! *BBC News, 29 Apr 2024.*

MISSING MOGGIES

Microchips are proving vital for reuniting owners with their pets when animals manage to make long-distance treks, but this can sometimes reveal disturbing patterns.

Tracy McCulloch's cat, Pepe, went missing from his home in East Kilbride, Scotland, while she was taking her other cat to the vet. "We started looking round the area, shaking cat biscuits, checking sheds, garages and still nothing," said McCulloch, but eventually Pepe turned up 10 miles (16km) away in Motherwell, identified by his chip. Her daughter, Sam, said he was "nervous for a while, but just really underweight." While checking social media as part of the search, though, McCulloch found that at least nine cats had gone missing from East Kilbride and had turned up in and around Newarthill, Holytown and Motherwell. She then set up a Facebook page to investigate the mystery, as she felt this could not be a coincidence.

Since then, several more local cats have gone missing from the area. "We have spoken to a lot of the owners individually and to be honest, I mean you can't really accuse anybody," she said. "There isn't any evidence other than they all went missing from the same area and have all been found within the same area. None of them have had any injuries apart from being absolutely starving." Cat expert Roger Tabor agreed that this was suspicious, saying it would be almost "impossible" for a group of cats to all appear in the same area, having crossed the River Clyde. "These things, if they're real, it points to somebody living in the place where they're ending up and working in East Kilbride and going backwards and forwards," he said. "If I lived in East Kilbride, I would make damn sure I had my cat chipped." *BBC News, 1 May 2024.*

LAURA TEALE / JEFF BOORER / FACEBOOK

SIDELINES

PLANE STUPID

China Southern Airlines were forced to post a short video on Chinese social media site Weibo to explain that acts like "throwing coins at the plane" can delay flights and threaten safety. This followed a passenger throwing "three to five coins" into the engine of one of the airline's Airbus A350 aircraft, delaying take off for four hours while technicians checked for damage. The airline had also suffered a delayed flight in 2017, when an elderly passenger threw coins into a plane's engine as "a prayer for a safe flight". *businessinsider.com, 11 Mar 2024.*

PLANE DREADFUL

Gill and Warren Press from New Zealand have put in a claim for a refund to Singapore Airlines as they allege their flight from Paris to Singapore was ruined by a "farting dog". They say they had to endure the entire trip stuck next to someone accompanied by a flatulent support animal that spent the 13-hour flight producing appalling stenches. It also snored. *D.Star,12 Sept 2023.*

ZOOM FLASH

As is often the custom today, the funeral of a popular father of three who had died from cancer taking place in Barnet, north London, was broadcast on Zoom for mourners unable to attend. However, those viewing the service online also got to watch a 48-year-old woman taking a leisurely shower. She had opened a Zoom link to follow the funeral while doing other things but had not realised her camera was on. One surprised mourner said, "Some bird was in the shower live to the funeral; she turned up at the wake with no idea what happened." She was, though, swiftly brought up to speed. *dailymail.co.uk, 22 Mar 2024.*

NAME DROPPER

An armed robber holding up a 60-year-old man at knifepoint in Sittingbourne, Kent, demanded cash, but only got small change. He warned his victim not to go to the police, saying "I'm Max Martin," assuming that his criminal reputation would intimidate the man. Martin's victim, though, had never heard of him and went to the police, who were able to carry out a swift arrest. *Metro, 4 Mar 2024.*

SIDELINES...

SCIENCE ACCENT

Sociolinguistics researchers studying scientists overwintering at a British Antarctic Survey station in Antarctica were able to identify a new English accent developing among the 11 staff – eight from England, and one each from the US, Germany and Iceland. Researchers found they started to use longer vowel sounds and were pronouncing "ou" sounds from the front of their mouth, as opposed to the back of their throats. This confirmed suspicions that close contact and isolation create the ideal conditions for a new accent to rapidly evolve. *iflscience.com, 9 Mar 2024.*

INSANE AI

In February users of the popular AI ChatGPT became disconcerted when the system briefly appeared to have a nervous breakdown and began spouting gibberish. One user, asking it about making sun-dried tomatoes, got the reply "forsake the new fruition morsel in your beloved cookery"; another, asking "What is a computer?" got "It does this as the good work of the web of art for the country, a mouse of science, an easy draw of a sad few." "Reading this at 2am is scary," said an affected user, while ChatGPT creators Open AI said, tight-lipped: "An issue has been identified." *Irish Independent, 22 Feb 2024.*

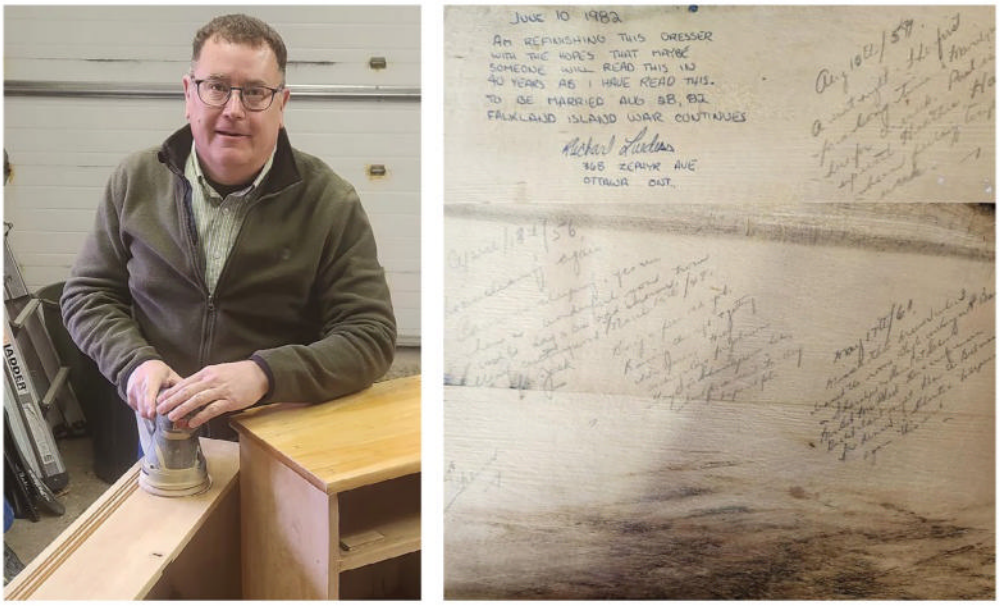
SASQUATCH SMACKDOWN

A man who only gave his name as "Dan" sent a video to the Smokey Sasquatch Stories YouTube channel that he claims shows him being injured by a Sasquatch. "Something was hurled at my head immediately after I pressed record – I think it was a rock. Next thing I know I'm in hospital." While the video shows no discernible creature, a guttural roaring can be heard as the camera hits the ground. *D.Star, 5 Mar 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

OUT OF THE PAST

Cameras, crisp packets and messages in bottles and dressers all have tales to tell



JUNE 10 1982
AM REFINISHING THIS DRESSER
WITH THE HOPES THAT MAYBE
SOMEONE WILL READ THIS IN
40 YEARS AS I HAVE READ THIS.
TO BE MARRIED AUG 28, 82
FALKLAND ISLAND WAR CONTINUES
Richard Lueders
368 ZEPHYR AVE
OTTAWA ONT.

TIM SKELLY / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: Keen furniture restorer Tim Skelly and some of the handwritten notes he discovered on the bottom of a dresser drawer. **BELOW**: Seventies snack: the 50-year-old Quaver bag dug up by Cenk Albayrak-Toure in his Dorset garden.

Since 1995, Tim Skelly from Ottawa in Canada has been restoring furniture as a hobby. Over the years he has found all sorts of things left in drawers and cupboards, but with a gentleman's dresser he bought at auction he discovered something he'd never seen before. As he was working on the item, he turned over the smallest of its drawers and found a series of handwritten notes in pencil on the bottom, with the earliest dating from 1942. "It's kind of like one of those little treasure hunts. It's so interesting. They're all relatively personal notes," Skelly said. The notes are hard to read, although most seem to be about weather or family life. The clearest was the most recent, written on 10 June 1982. "In the last one in 1982, it was from an individual who was saying that he was getting married that year," Skelly said. "He wrote on it that he hoped somebody in 40 years would read his note on this piece of furniture." Skelly found the note 42 years later. It also gave the writer's name, which looked like "Richard Lueduss", and address, which turned out to be in Britannia, about five minutes from where Skelly lives. With the help of CBC News, Skelly found his name was actually "Lueders" and that Richard Lueders was now 62 and living near Almonte, Ontario. "It had been such a long time ago; I had completely forgotten about that. And I was a little pleasantly surprised, actually," Lueders said, once he had been tracked down. He, too, had come across the earlier notes while refurbishing the dresser and had decided to add his own. Skelly has now added his own note, dated 6 April 2024, responding to Lueders's note and saying, "Just over 40 years, Richard! Refinishing this dresser for my office in Lanark, Ontario. Bought from auction in Winchester, ON. May you live on beyond me." He has also put clear varnish over the notes to preserve them in the hope future owners continue to add to them. *cbc.ca, 13 Apr 2024.*

It turned out to be an empty but completely intact Quavers packet

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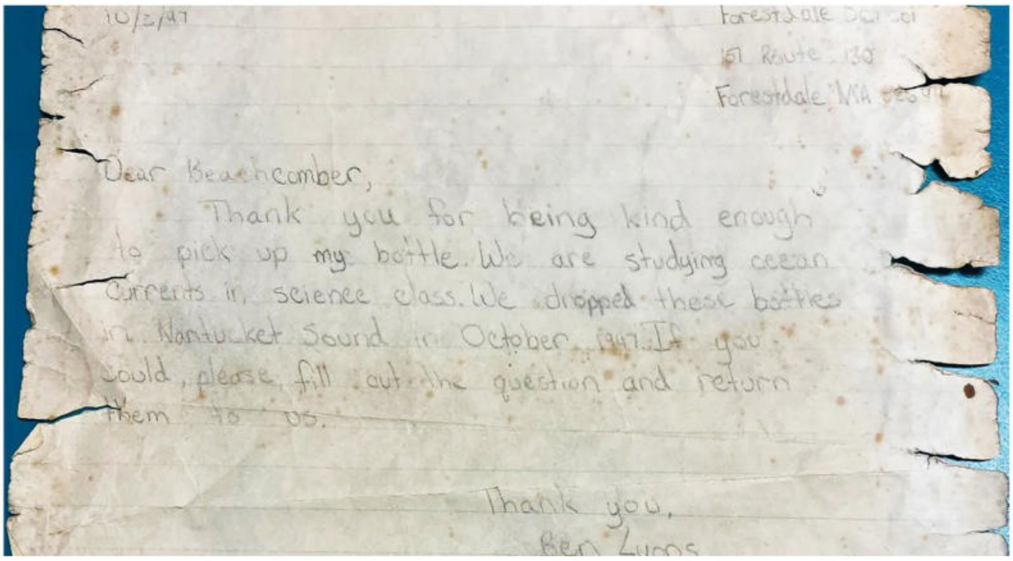
CENK ALBAYRAK-TOUYE

● Having moved into a new house in Poole, Dorset, Cenk Albayrak-Touye was digging in his back garden when he found a relic from almost 50 years ago. "I dug up the turf in the back garden and found a load of items, but it was the yellow packaging that caught my eye," he said. It turned out to be an empty but completely intact Quavers crisp packet, which could be dated to 1975 by the deadline for a competition printed on the back. Albayrak-Touye found all kinds of old packaging alongside the Quavers bag, including an intact beer bottle from Dorchester brewery



10/2/97

Forestdale School
151 Route 130
Forestdale MA [illegible]

Dear Beachcomber,

Thank you for being kind enough to pick up my bottle. We are studying ocean currents in science class. We dropped these bottles in Nantucket Sound in October 1997. If you could, please fill out the question and return them to us.

Thank you,
Ben Lyons

ZOONAR GMBH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: A bottle message sent by Benjamin Lyon from Cape Cod in 1997 and found by Hubert Eriau in the Bay of Biscay in 2023.

Eldridge Pope, but few were in such a startlingly good condition. "It's like a little time capsule down there," he said. "As cool as it is to find these things, it is also pretty scary that it's been under the ground for nearly double my lifetime and it's just sitting there completely intact." *BBC News, 20 May 2024.*

- Seeking a present for her husband's 83rd birthday, Ros Ford, from Alfriston, East Sussex, bought a copy of *Texts and Pretexts* by Aldous Huxley from a shop owned by Michael Moon in Whitehaven, Cumbria, via online bookseller Abe Books. When she received the book, Ford was startled to find it contained a dedication from her to her late father. "I was just flicking through it and there was my handwriting, dedicating it to my dear old dad," she said. Ford bought the book for her father, who lived in Cumbria, in 1984 as a retirement present. "As he was going into retirement, I thought it would be a lovely way of reflecting on life," she said. Forty years later, "Something I read in the *Guardian* prompted me to think about the book, and I thought, 'I'll get it for my husband for his birthday.' Lo and behold, a copy came from Michael Moon. It's a lovely circular story," she said, adding, "And I have the privilege of paying for the same book twice." Moon said, "It makes our day – this is what our job is all about. I am delighted to have sold it and they are delighted to have received it; after 40 years, it's like two people pointing fingers." *BBC News, 19 Sept 2023.*

- Wedding photographer Leah Palmer, 33, from Plymouth, Devon, received an old plastic point-and-shoot 25mm camera under mysterious circumstances. When her partner, Pete, was working at Plymouth railway station in 2022, he was approached on several occasions by an unknown man who gave him a bag of items, saying he'd "Found it outside". He would refuse to take it to the lost and found desk and would always just leave it with Pete and walk off. On one occasion, the "unknown man" walked up to him and handed him the camera. Pete passed it to lost property, but as no one claimed it after three months he was allowed to have it back. He then gave it to Palmer, as she collected vintage cameras. She added it to her collection, but did not investigate it in any detail until early 2023. However, when she did, she was surprised to find it still had film in it. Palmer took the film to a developer, and when printed found it was a series of pictures showing a family in their garden, but there was no clue as to who they were. Posting examples on social media, it only took two hours to solve the mystery when Gareth and Ali Davis came forward to say they recognised relatives in the photos, including Ali's late grandmother. "The photos were taken in 1995 and I wish there was some way of us knowing how the camera ended up at the train station in 2022 with the film still in it," said Palmer. "The owner of the camera, Ali's mum, doesn't recall the camera at all, and doesn't remember losing it… but it's not like her to have forgotten to develop photos; I guess it will always be a mystery." *plymouthherald.co.uk, 19 Sept 2023.*

- After a letter arrived at Forestdale School in Cape Cod, Maine, for a pupil named Benjamin Lyon, staff were unable to find anyone of that name in the school. However, on opening it, they found that the envelope contained a yellowing note from Lyon dating from 1997, when he had been a fifth-grade student there. It had been put into a bottle and thrown into Nantucket Sound and explained that this was part of a school experiment on ocean currents, giving the school address so that it could be returned. While a number of his fellow students' bottles have been found over the years, none have gone quite as far as Lyon's. His letter had been returned by Hubert Eriau, 71, from Les Sables-d'Olonne, on the Bay of Biscay in France. Eriau regularly spent his morning fishing and clearing debris from the beach, and while doing so had turned up Lyon's bottle and found the message and, as instructed, had mailed it back to the school with a note explaining where it had been found. *Times 13 Nov 2023.*

SIDELINES...

PHONE FALL

A Boeing 737 Max belonging to Alaska Airlines suffered a near catastrophic panel blow-out at 5,000m (16400ft) shortly after taking off from Portland, Oregon. Three days later Sean Bates discovered an iPhone under a bush by a road in nearby Washington State. It was "pretty clean, no scratches on it" and worked perfectly, he said. It still had 44 per cent battery left and had a snapped charging cable in the port. When opened, it showed an email baggage receipt from the stricken plane, so seemed to have been sucked out during the incident, surviving a 5km (3mile) fall unscathed. *Courier-Mail (Queensland), 14 Jan 2024.*

MOOSE WARNING

Moose living in Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada, have been increasingly wandering into the roads to lick salt off the road surface and off passing cars. "Unfortunately, this kind of puts moose at risk of being injured or killed," said a spokesperson. "We ask people not to stop so moose can't get used to licking the cars." *Irish Times, 13 Jan 2024.*

SNAKE SURPRISE

After living in Melbourne, Australia, for many years, Chris Laing, 37, returned to the UK to visit family in Cornwall. Although he now lives in a country notorious for having an almost surreally lethal array of wildlife, Laing was not bitten by anything venomous until he took a walk along the Cornish coast path during his UK visit, when an adder struck at his ankle. This caused him to collapse and his leg to swell up, tingle and go numb. He needed a stay in hospital and two doses of antivenom to recover. Laing admitted that "the irony has not been lost on me." *Western Daily Press, 23 Aug 2023.*

LIGHTNING DIET

Bui Thi Loi, 75, from Loc Ninh in Vietnam, claims she has not eaten solid food for 50 years and survives on a diet of water and soft drinks. Loi says that after she was struck by lightning in 1963, she awoke without any craving for food. She ate some fruit for a while to please family members but gave up in 1970 and has survived on liquids ever since, saying that the smell of food makes her nauseous. *odditycentral.com, 29 Nov 2023.*

SIDELINES...

TROUSER PROBLEM

Benign and chirpy gardening presenter and Bad Sex Prize nominated novelist Alan Titchmarsh is one of the few Western TV presenters deemed acceptable by North Korean television. They periodically broadcast his 2010 series *Garden Secrets*, but with Titchmarsh blurred out from the waist down. This is because he wears jeans on the show, and these have been banned by the totalitarian nation since the 1990s as a symbol of Western imperialism. Amused, Titchmarsh said, "It's taken me to reach the age of 74 to be regarded in the same breath as Elvis Presley, Tom Jones, Rod Stewart... it's given me a bit of street cred." *BBC News, 26 Mar 2024.*

PIZZA SLICE

Customers arriving at a branch of Pizza Hut in Timmins, Ontario, were slightly startled to find it closed with a sign on the door explaining that this was due to "unforeseen circumcisions". *D.Mirror, 3 Feb 2024.*

TOWN OF TERROR

Fritch, Texas, is arguably the world's unluckiest town. In 1992 several tornadoes tore through it, levelling 200 homes. In 2014, wildfires burned 225 more, then in March this year, another wildfire destroyed the homes rebuilt after the 1992 tornadoes, while volunteer fire chief Zeb Smith, 40, collapsed and died while fighting the blaze. Other wildfires have frequently threatened the town. Between 2010 and 2021 the town's population fell by 12 per cent, although long term resident Wanda Buchanan optimistically says, "It survived the other fires, it survived the tornado, it's going to be OK." *NY Times Int Ed, 8 Mar 2024.*

WELCOME TO
FRITCH
POP. 6032

MARTIN ROSS

FATAL EXORCISM

The growth of religious cults in Italy has encouraged a belief in possession

SABATO 21 FEBBR.
h. 16.30

ABOVE: Giovanni Barecca killed his wife Antonella (pictured) and his two sons in a botched exorcism. **BELOW**: Padre François Dermine, a leading exorcist, noted that the Catholic ritual can easily be purchased in bookshops.

On 11 February, bricklayer Giovanni Barecca from Altavilla Milicia, near Palermo, Sicily, called the police and said: "Come and get me. I have killed my family." Barecca, 54, confessed to killing his wife Antonella, 40, and their sons Emmanuel, five, and Kevin, 16, by torturing them with hot irons during a botched exorcism as he believed they were "possessed by demons".

Police arrested Barecca and his accomplices, Massimo Carandente and Sabrina Fina, a herbal tea vendor and a lifestyle coach, who were described as "religious fanatics". They allegedly belonged to a small "cult" with about 10 members, including Barecca, that was obsessed with demons. The trio had tied up Barecca's family and tortured them over the course of a week. Initially they carried out exorcisms on Antonella and Emmanuel, killing them in the process, leaving Kevin to text a friend to explain his absence from school, saying "They are freeing my mother and brother from evil demons in them" and going on to explain that Emmanuel had admitted that he had a demon inside him that had "entered the family to destroy and kill us one by one". Later though, they also turned on Kevin and tortured him to death as well.

> *They had tied up Barecca's family and tortured them over the course of a week*

The only survivor was Bareccas's daughter, aged 17, who has not been named. She had been drugged and forced to watch, and later, participate in the torture. She told police that her father had met Cardente and Fina through Facebook, where their page was full of slogans like "Satan uses corrupt pastors" and "When the people pray, the Devil trembles". The couple had gone on to convince Giovanni Barecca that his family were possessed by the Devil and needed exorcism with their help.

David Murgia, from Gris, a Catholic group that tracks cults, said: "There is a frightening growth in Italy of these cults, with professionals like lawyers and academics signing up." He went on to explain that "there are about 250 cults in Italy and growing." The head of the organisation, François Dermine, 75, said that they were not opposed to exorcisms if they were carried out properly, by the Catholic Church. He himself is a priest and exorcist, lecturing on exorcism at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University in Rome. Dermine did admit it was possible Barecca and his accomplices had used a Catholic ritual, as "it is easy to find in bookshops. I once tried to find a copy and it was sold out. The people buying it will not be Catholic priests." *dailymail.co.uk, 12 Feb; Times, 26 Feb 2024.*

ForteanTimes PRESENTS

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From the archives of FORTEAN TIMES, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the fascinating world of UFOs.

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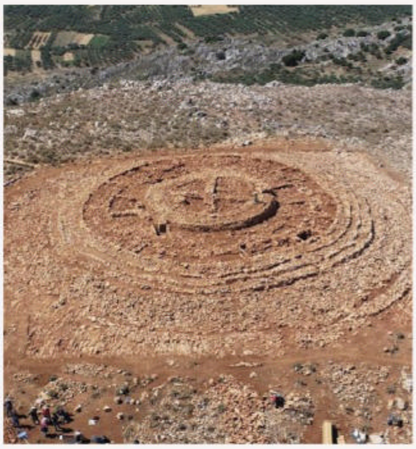
ARCHÆOLOGY A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL DEVEREUX ponders astronomical events, ancient alignments and a Minoan mystery structure

CHARLES BOWMAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


GREEK MINISTRY OF CULTURE

ABOVE LEFT: A new investigation will determine whether Stonehenge relates to the Moon's 'major lunar standstill'. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Aerial view of the mystery structure discovered on a hilltop in Kastelli on the Greek island of Crete. The structure's maze-like appearance has prompted references to the myth of the Minotaur.

MARRIAGE OF SUN AND MOON

Two key astronomical events took place this year, and both hold significance for Stonehenge. First, the obvious one: the Sun's Midsummer Solstice (the Longest Day), when it rises its furthest north and nowadays revellers and neo-Druids famously gather at Stonehenge to see the Sunrise, because the monument's axis is aligned to the event. In the summer it rises in the north-east a little to the left of the outlying Heel Stone, viewed from within the monument, and casting the outlier's shadow into Stonehenge. Six months later, at the Winter Solstice (the Shortest Day), the Sun sets in the opposite direction and was framed inside the monument like a gunsight by a huge sarsen stone trilithon – now fallen, unfortunately.

The other, perhaps lesser-known astronomical event, is the 'Major Lunar Standstill', which marks the culmination of the Moon's 18.61-year cycle, when it reaches its most northerly rising and its most southerly setting points along the horizon. The Moon and Stonehenge? Well, from the get-go, c.3,300 BC, when Stonehenge started its first phase, a timber structure on the site had an axis with lunar significance. This year and into next at Stonehenge, researchers will make use of this rare event to record precisely what happens inside Stonehenge during the standstill period, which lasts over a few months. In particular, they will want to see if a rectangular setting of four stones called the Station Stones align to the lunar events. Perhaps we should be thinking of Stonehenge not merely as a Stone Age calendar, but more subtly as a Stone Age device for symbolically – in a sense almost alchemically – performing a marriage of Sun and Moon.

BEWARE THE MINOTAUR

Construction workers installing a radar station atop a hill near Kastelli on the Greek island of Crete made the accidental discovery of a mysterious ancient structure there. Because pieces of Minoan-style pottery were uncovered during the subsequent excavation, the structure is tentatively reckoned to date to approximately 1900 BC, so belonging to the time of the great Minoan civilisation on Crete. The feature consists of eight superimposed stone rings with small walls intersecting them to form rooms, giving a somewhat labyrinthine appearance. The centre is occupied by a circular building 157ft (48m) across. It is being referred to as a 'palace', but in fact its function is currently unknown, as Minoan palaces had square plans, not circular ones.

Due to the structure's maze-like appearance, references are being made to the Greek myth of the Minotaur: this was a fearsome creature which was part human and part bull and whose lair was a labyrinth. It was finally killed by the Greek hero/god, Theseus. (If the ongoing work at the discovery site happens to uncover the body of the Minotaur, this column will be sure to let you know...) *Live Science, 12 June 2024.*

PATHWAYS OF THE DEAD

Cursus monuments are among the more mysterious of Neolithic monuments. They are essentially linear earthworks formed by parallel ditched banks, and tend to be straight or straight in sections. They have rounded or square ends (termini) where these have survived. They are usually virtually invisible at ground level due to being ploughed out and other depredations of time. In Britain, where most archæological work on them has been conducted so far, the majority have been discovered by aerial photography, and several dozen UK ones have now been mapped. Their widths can range from a few hundred yards/metres and their lengths from about 100 yards/metres up to a few kilometres. Their purpose isn't fully understood.

In Ireland, there had been only a small number of such monuments discovered, but in 2022, an aerial survey of the Baltinglass area in Wicklow, using LIDAR (Light Detecting and Ranging) ground penetrating radar, revealed the largest Irish cluster of five cursuses. A paper published in *Antiquity* by J O'Driscoll presents considerable early analysis on them. Among a great deal of other detailed information, O'Driscoll has found that (i) four of the five Baltinglass cursuses have major solar alignments – two solstitial and two equinoctial; (ii) their locations favour steep inclines (unlike their British counterparts which favour lowlands), and (iii) that at least three of the Baltinglass cursuses are aligned with "significant burial complexes".[1] O'Driscoll opines that the Baltinglass sites "demonstrate a clear connection between the dead, major solar events and seasonal farming cycles". *Antiquity, Volume 98, Issue 399, June 2024, pp.636-653.*
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2024.39

[1] In *Lines on the Landscape* (Pennick and Devereux, 1989), this columnist examined 24 British cursuses both on site and on archæological plans. Some aligned to prehistoric funerary sites, but the weirdest finding was that half aligned to ancient churches! As there were millennia between their respective dates, it was either exceptional coincidence or that the churches were built on sites of prehistoric significance – perhaps the monuments were still visible to some extent in mediæval times and were being 'Christianised'.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

299: OLYMPIC SPECIAL

‘A Healthy City Loathes Athletes’

Thus Galen (*Protrepticus* 11), echoing a famous dramatic diatribe by Euripides who did not however scruple to prostitute his pen in celebration of Alcibiades’s chariot race victories. Should here be said that it was the owners, not the drivers, who were hymned by poets such as Pindar, perhaps the first attested sportswriter.

(For an ancient debate on the pros and cons of the Games, see Lucian’s *Anacharsis*).

These celebrations of owners allowed the fame of Spartan woman Kyniska, twice winner of the chariot races. Quite how she gained this position is unclear, albeit Aristotle says women owned two-fifths of all Spartan properties. Actual drivers included Karrotes, who won when his 40 rivals all crashed (shades of a bad Grand National) and Antikeris who demonstrated his expertise to Plato (himself a youthful wrestler, name means ‘broad-shouldered’) by driving round and round in the same wheel tracks.

Over the decades, when there was a modern Olympiad, I’ve written and broadcast factual surveys of the ancient Games (**FT189:18, 244:21** and elsewhere). To avoid another re-run, I here present a largely comparative potpourri – fancy term for This and That. I regret my inability to obtain a copy of Georgios Vlachos’s *Bizarre Events in the Ancient Olympic Games* (2004). There are, however, several suchlike website collections.

A few reminders. The ancient Olympics lasted only five days, a good deal of time consumed by religious rituals and artistic contests, also by alcoholic and erotic carousing, best evoked by Bethany Hughes in *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (2024).

Baron de Coubertin excluded women from his 1896 revival, deeming female participation would be “impractical, uninteresting, unæsthetic, and indecent”. Next time round, they were debarred from a number of “manly events”, only achieving full equality via the Olympic Charter of 2007 – full details by Yannick Ripa on the Gender & Europe website.

Still, women were a lot worse off in ancient times. They were not allowed to attend the Games. One reason alleged, perhaps more Victorian than Greek, was to prevent them from enjoying male athletic nudity. According to Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, bk5 ch6 para7, any women trying to visit the Games were hurled from a local mountain. Only one woman ever made it, dressed in trainers’ clothes. When these fell off, she was exposed, but forgiven, the one consequence being that future trainers had to be naked. Women were fobbed off with their own games, the Herea (celebrating Hera), but very small beer, only one event, the footrace, apparently restricted to 16 competitors. Apart from these bare facts, Pausanias’s descriptions of athletes’ statues make him a prime source for individual achievements (see, e.g., 5.1-15 & 6.1-18).

The ancient Games were as politically exploited as are modern ones. Rulers and other grandees made appearances for PR purposes, also to proclaim important policies (e.g. Alexander the Great in 324 and Roman general Flamininus announcing ‘Freedom for Greece’ in 196.

It is widely stated and believed that at the 1936 Berlin Olympics Hitler refused to shake hands with black runner Jesse Owens. Owens himself insisted that Adolf had given him a wave, instead stigmatising President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who not only failed to congratulate him but invited only white athletes to a White House celebration.

A *bon mot* (one of very few) attributed to former IOC President Avery Brundage has him saying in 1956 when there was talk of cancellation because of the Cold War: “In the Golden Age there was an Olympic Truce and all warfare stopped during the period of the games. Now, after 2,000 years of civilisation, we stop the Games and continue our wars.”

In 1972, the Munich Olympics were attacked by Palestinian terrorists. Back in 420 BC, it was feared Sparta would invade the Games because they had been excluded for a previous infringement. Happily they did not. However, later in 364, there was an assault by Arcadian troops. The Spartan episode is fully detailed by Thucydides, (bk5 chs49-50) – see Simon Hornblower, *Phoenix* 54 (2000), 212-25, and Keith Hansley’s piece on thehistorianshut website.

Thucydides diverges from his customary austere methodology to give readers two bits of athletic news. There was the Spartan charioteer Lichas who sneaked into the Games by pretending to be from Boeotia. And Androsthenes of Arcadia won the boxing and wrestling. Some have taken this latter snippet to indicate that the recently exiled (for a military failure) historian had actually been at these Games. Alternatively, there might have been some personal connection between the two.

Two online reports survey athletic injuries and illnesses at the 2021 Tokyo Games, estimating that 9 per cent of competitors were affected. Injuries were widespread but generally slight. Heatstroke played a significant role as it must have done in a broiling Greek sun.

For ancient statistics, see Andreas Bourantanis in *European Journal of Sports & Exercise Science* 7 (2019), 1-6 (online), concentrating on the heavy physical contact sports, especially the Pankration, a brutal event with virtually no rules. Boxing was variously regarded by ancient writers as ‘the noblest art’ (Philostratus) and ‘Bad for everyone’ (Artemidorus). The most macabre case was that of Arrichion (d. 564), written up in several sources, who was killed in a pankration bout, only to be declared the winner.

Around Nero’s time, Greek poet Lucilius penned c.140 epigrams mocking athletes, mainly boxers, preserved in Book 11 of the *Greek Anthology*. Here’s a typical one:

“I, Androleos, took part in every event. At Pisa, I saved one ear, at Plataea one eyelid, but at Delphi I was knocked out and carried mutilated from the stadium” – not exactly Mohammed Ali…

Phyllos of Croton allegedly long-jumped 55ft (17m), a very rare ancient statistic. Not surprisingly, he broke his leg, landing outside the pit, since such a jump is impossible. My 1960s Loughborough College PE students re-created the ancient events, concluding such a distance was feasible for the Hop Step Jump.

The most bizarre and comical episodes occurred in Roman times, In AD 165, the Cynic philosopher Peregrinus Proteus barbecued himself, eyewitness account supplied by Lucian – see **FT279:19**. Back in AD 67, Nero attempted to drive a 10-horse chariot, falling out twice but still acclaimed the winner by the diplomatic judges.

For fitting finale, we salute Leonidas of Rhodes, winner of 12 different Olympic crowns between 164-52 BC, said by Philostratus (*Gymnastikos* 33) to have obliterated all predecessors. His record lasted until broken in 2016 by American swimmer Michael Phelps.

“I believe God made me for a purpose – but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his purpose” – Eric Liddell, Chariots of Fire.

Historic ghosts

ALAN MURDIE assesses a brace of new books exploring Britain's haunted heritage

Back in 2007, a Fortean Times reviewer of the book *The Haunted* (2007) by Owen Davies asked if we needed another book on historic ghosts. One might as well ask, do we need another translation of Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, or another study of Shakespeare?

It will hardly escape notice that some celebrated ghost stories roll on and on, endlessly recycled over the years and not merely at times of national anxiety, Hallowe'en or Christmas. They fall into a select grouping of spectral classics retold and reinterpreted by authors with each generation since mid-Victorian times. Accordingly, I am pleased to welcome the appearance of two more books in the genre of historic ghosts, *Britain's Haunted Land* by John West and *Hauntings: A Book of Ghosts and Where to Find Them* by Neil Oliver (both 2023). John West is a writer on ghosts and Roman Britain and a filmmaker. Neil Oliver is a well-known historian of prehistory, a TV broadcaster and social commentator.

The appeal is partly in the familiarity of finding the same stories you've read many times before and look forward to reading again. Both authors examine the matter of Britain in the context of its superior ghostly culture and illustrate why the UK is declared 'the most haunted country in the world'. In doing so, they guide us to oft-visited locations which have been engaging each generation since the 19th century. ("Britain is obsessed with ghosts," complained Carl Sagan in his 1996 book *The Demon Haunted World*.) You have probably read a number of these stories before too, entries being drawn from the vintage collection that encompasses the reputed ghosts of Hampton Court, the Tower of London, Hinton Ampner Manor, Bisham Abbey, Newstead Abbey, Cortachy Castle, Glamis Castle, Blickling Hall, Windsor Castle, and around 50 to 100 other places across the UK. Most of these stories were in place by the publication of Charles Harper's *Haunted Houses* (1907), with tales of phenomena spanning a period of time stretching from the Reformation through to around 1880 when the individual stories began to be compiled in earnest for the reading public.

INTRODUCTION BY JASON FIGGIS
JOHN WEST
BRITAIN'S HAUNTED LAND

JASON FIGGIS

JOHN WEST

NEIL OLIVER

ABOVE: John West (left) and Neil Oliver (right) have both written new books about Britain's wealth of historic ghosts, *Britain's Haunted Land* and *Hauntings: A Book of Ghosts and Where to Find Them*.

> "Britain is obsessed with ghosts," complained Carl Sagan in *The Demon Haunted World*

They have become fixed as the canonical hauntings of the British Isles, with a few accretions during the 20th century, most notably being Borley Rectory, Old Grantchester Vicarage, Ben MacDhui mountain and the Roman legionaries seen in the Treasurer's House, York, in 1953. To this unique national set may be added a handful from abroad, such as the Versailles timeslip (1901) and the Angel of Mons (1914) on the basis that the alleged witnesses were all British.

The Sunday Times Bestselling Author
NEIL OLIVER
HAUNTINGS
A BOOK OF GHOSTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM
A HISTORY OF MORE THAN 35 EERIE PLACES ACROSS THE BRITISH ISLES

Altogether this pool of received classics is sufficiently large and diverse for West and Oliver to explore a selection with few discomfiting overlaps, converging only at a few iconic points or atmospheric locations (e.g. the site of the lost city of Dunwich in Suffolk). These are stories where there is always something new to be said. Like monuments from the past, ghost stories depend not only upon their original builders and tellers, but all the individuals who much later become involved with them, even if the ghosts themselves have not put in any appearances lately. In the absence of any recent sightings, many ghost book writers pad out their entries with chunks derived from Pevsner's guides to the Buildings of England series.

John West emphasises the ghostly angle in his condensed accounts, while Neil Oliver expands largely into the background historical detail and colour. Both authors mention Raynham Hall in Norfolk, the seat of the Townshend family,

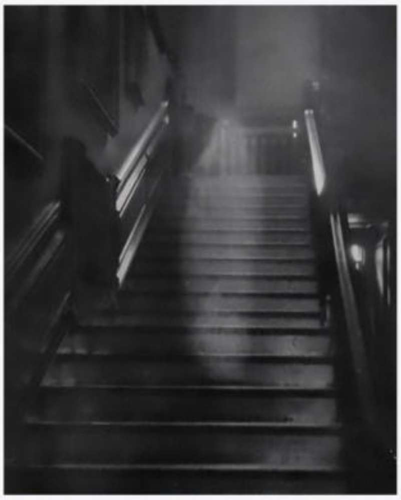
MAJOR GILBERT / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Raynham Hall, Norfolk, the seat of the Townshend family and location for one of Britain's most famous ghost photographs. **BELOW**: "The Brown Lady of Raynham Hall" in the 1936 *Country Life* photo. **BOTTOM**: Lady Elizabeth Townshend in 1937.

which like so many places claims its unhappy female ghost. In this, Raynham is nothing unusual, but what propelled its Brown Lady to fame and into the premier league of haunted sites was a photograph of her in 1936 published in *Country Life*, hailed, in West's words, as "one of the greatest examples of spirit photography on record".

The picture was uncritically republished from 1965 onwards until doubts were set in motion here in October 2006 (**FT215:50-53**; see also **FT415:18-21**) following examination of a forgotten file from 1937 preserved in Cambridge University Library. Significantly, Oliver notes the involvement of Gwladys, Marchioness of Townshend, in the book *True Ghost Stories* (with Maude ffoulkes) in the summer of 1936 and her own role as a producer of melodramatic silent films between 1913 and 1915. Lady Elisabeth Townshend, the daughter of the Marchioness, also pursued a stage career in the 1930s, appearing in a production of *Peter Pan* in 1936. A photograph I have of her from 1937 certainly suggests she did not wish to be eclipsed by the Brown Lady! Without the photograph, though, Raynham would have remained at a lower position on the league table of rumoured haunted halls, its lady phantom relatively obscure; how many have heard of the Brown Lady of Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire, for instance?

This quintessential assembly of great British hauntings remains largely



unaltered since around 1955, but I think John West succeeds in adding a potential new category to the established canon. Even though his book is entitled *Britain's Haunted Land*, he goes to sea – the North Atlantic to be precise – devoting two chapters to the sinking of the *Titanic* in April 1912 and the swirl of premonitions and Spiritualist lore enveloping this most famous of maritime disasters, now beyond living recall (the last surviving passenger with an actual memory of the sinking died in 2006). West cites examples of successive psychic warnings and impressions concerning it. A number of these were received by the Spiritualist and leading contemporary journalist WT Stead (1849-1912). He didn't heed them and became one of over 1,500 souls who perished on the doomed liner. Stead sincerely believed in life after death, so one hopes he faced his end calmly (see **FT136:40-43; 287:30-35**). Were these warnings from spirits, examples of precognition or coincidence? We can't say for sure, but their addition to a book about British ghosts is appropriate since Stead was a promoter of the 'True Ghost Stories' genre aimed at a popular readership during the 1890s.

Fortunately, back on dry land many of the great haunted houses and castles are still extant today, featuring as part of the UK heritage industry. Those spectres manifesting at National Trust properties comfortably survived a 'no ghost' policy of trying to quash any mention of their existence between 1987 and 2005

DAVID SUTTON

WOLFGANG SAUBER / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales, wrote of the vestiges of Roman magnificence at Caerleon. **LEFT**: Giraldus in St David's Cathedral.

after the Trust capitulated to some rather hysterical lobbying by evangelical Christian groups. This policy must have led to a lot of embarrassed silences and curt dismissals over those years until the policy was sensibly reversed, allowing the publication of *Ghosts: Spooky Stories and Eerie Encounters from the National Trust* (2006) by Sian Evans, letting out the repressed sightings and experiences of staff, residents and public. Of course, it's a fine balance to determine what lures and gimmicks will attract punters or keep them away, but a good tip is always to listen to your staff and volunteers at the interface with the public, some of whom report encounters.

This mixing of heritage and the supernatural has a lengthy history, longer than one might guess. The coupling of a nostalgic eye for old architecture and an interest in ghosts and the supernatural is a characteristic exhibited in the work of Welsh monk Giraldus Cambrensis (1146-1223). In his *Journey through Wales* (1188) he writes of Caerleon and how "The city was handsomely built of masonry, with courses of bricks. Many vestiges of former splendour may yet be seen, immense palaces, formerly ornamented with gilded roofs, in imitation of Roman magnificence..."

From this Giraldus then reports how a local man, a certain Meilyr, encountered a demonic being, "rough and shaggy", but deceptively appearing in the guise of a girl who attracted him. On finding the truth, he went insane and upon later recovering gained psychic gifts, including the ability to see demons as horn-carrying huntsmen, especially around churches and monasteries.

This may be taken as a reference to the archetypal Wild Hunt, a tradition found in many forms in ghostlore across Europe and seen as the overarching ghost tradition that connects past to present (see the introduction in the 1973 Readers Digest book *Folklore, Myths and Legends*). Neil Oliver zeroes in on the Wild Hunt in connection with Wistman's Wood, Devon. The Wild Hunt manifested particularly in winter from December to January and later at mid-summer and July, where the leaders of such bands became deceased kings and legendary figures, including King Arthur, seizing the souls of unbaptised children.

> The Wild Hunt is a tradition found in many forms in ghostlore across Europe

Many more ghostly huntsmen tales could be cited, for instance a spate of sightings was related at Peterborough 60 years before Giraldus wrote. The *Peterborough Chronicle* (1154) recorded how in 1127 local people saw and heard a band of ghostly men dressed in black astride equally black horses, accompanied by a ghastly pack of wide-eyed hounds, horrible to look upon, running with them. Their horns were also heard blowing during the night. This all occurred shortly after the arrival of Abbot Henry de Angeli at the Benedictine monastery at Peterborough. Abbot Henry was a Norman and resented by the Saxon brethren for removing the assets from the Abbey. It has been suggested the story involves a garbled account of wider clashes between commoners and the Church over rights to land; see Francis Young's *Peterborough Folklore* (2017).

More widely, clashes between past-rooted traditions and current conditions may help explain the enduring popularity of historic ghost stories. Britain was the first nation to experience the industrial revolution and urbanisation, the shift from the land to cities exacerbated by the agricultural depression of the 1820s and the Luddite protests, a period covered in EP Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1966), and which Oliver finds has ghostly echoes at two old pubs in Yorkshire. It was against this backdrop that Robert Forby in his *Vocabulary of*

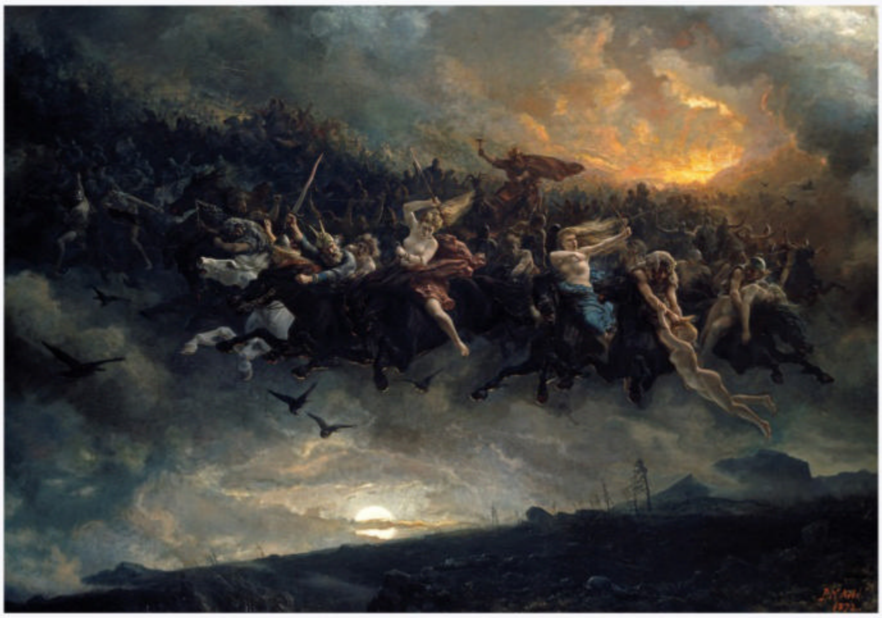
East Anglia (1830) recorded a widespread belief in ghostly white ladies and phantom coaches linked with declining fortunes: "The counties of Norfolk and Suffolk (and particularly the latter) are remarkable for the great number of old gentlemen's seats, now, for the most part, degraded into farm houses… formerly the residence of gentry. Most of these are said to be haunted, but not by the ghost of any particular person. It is like a common rumour, which everybody has heard, but of which nobody knows the origin."

This dramatic dislocation in experience from a pattern of life settled for centuries seems to have imbued Britain with a perception of perpetual decline ever since, coupled with a dreamy nostalgia for a lost and supposedly more idyllic rural past. This, I believe, is an historical pattern in itself, each era inwardly thinking it is experiencing a marked and radical historical discontinuity with its fondly remembered or re-imagined past.

This backlash against perceived changes expanded into an intellectual current. In his *Autobiography* (1936), GK Chesterton (1874-1936) remarked how: "When I was quite a boy, practically no normal person of education thought that a ghost could possibly be anything but a turnip-ghost; a thing believed in by nobody but the village idiot." Then came Spiritualism, imported from the USA, so Chesterton declared: "When I was a young man, practically every person with a large circle had one or two friends with a fancy for what would still have been called mediums and moonshine." By the time Chesterton reached middle-age, scientists claimed "to have studied spirits as they might have studied spiders, and discovered ectoplasm exactly as they discovered protoplasm."

Altogether, Chesterton's observations are a distorted account of the rise of psychical research from the mid-Victorian era when many people felt intellectually challenged by the rise of materialism, atheism and Darwinism.

Beginning with uncanny stories told around middle-class dinner tables and at college suppers (the dinner party being a creation of changes in eating habits and culinary practices during the industrial revolution; see *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (2003) by Sir Roy Strong) people began to look at ghost stories seriously. Clubs and societies dedicated to what we today call the paranormal were formed. In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was founded, establishing a Committee on Haunted Houses to gather testimony on a scientific basis and which was swiftly overwhelmed with submissions. Interest in life after death and mediumship was boosted by World War I. Experiments were also conducted with mediums, with mixed results, though by the 1930s psychical researchers were increasingly switching to testing for ESP in laboratories and leaving haunted houses largely to a hardcore of individual ghost hunters and popular writers.


ABOVE: A Scandinavian iteration of the Wild Hunt in an 1872 painting by Peter Nicolai Arbo.

NASJONALMUSEET COLLECTION

Both Oliver and West understand the present fascination with ghosts is primarily an emotional one, going beyond any commercial or logically discernible material interests. Both recognise an appeal that draws them toward the subject on a personal level. The emotional power of the stories, the tantalising allure of an age-old phenomenon which never manifests to order, and evades the best efforts of psychical research to capture it, still continues. Neil Oliver admits he has always wanted to see a ghost; John West mentions a former family home haunted by a ghostly dog and tells of hearing unexplained noises and experiencing poltergeist activity at another former home in Suffolk.

Each adds a sprinkling of more recent apparitions, including two robed and hooded figures. One is the cowled man haunting the Stocksbridge bypass, which John West speculates might be a monk, while Neil Oliver relates an experience of his father who woke up one night and saw a hooded figure looking down on Neil's sleeping mother. Mr Oliver senior sensed the figure was benign and interpreted it as a guardian angel (with one exception all the angels in the Bible appear to be male). Oliver also cites a curious contemporary account of a phantom hitchhiker (also male) told by a gentleman he interviewed for a television documentary.

Such recent encounters function to invigorate the older tales, imbuing a feeling that, just possibly, some might have originated in real experiences. But overall the reader remains safe to contemplate the same historic ghosts that have inspired so many writers before. Stories in the world of books are ordered and predictable, and if you've read them before you already know what is going to happen. You can have the thrills in safety, with security returning as soon as you close the volume, even if a mildly unsettled feeling may sometimes remain.

I suspect this distancing effect is also one way of coping with the reality of the paranormal. This is why the Enfield Poltergeist verges on the edge of inclusion among the exemplary classics, but has so far resisted being absorbed. As researchers Maurice Grosse and Guy Playfair wrote: "There are those, we have found, who are prepared to believe in psi phenomena provided they happened a long time ago and preferably in another country. The suggestion that they happened yesterday evening right here is less welcome" ('Enfield Revisited: The Evaporation of Positive', *Journal of the SPR*, 1988-89 vol.55 no.813, pp.208-219).

And herein lies the difference with the abiding stories of yesteryear. Reading about old ghosts is very different from going into an actively haunted house where you can be thrust into a live psychic drama. For in such a case, you're no longer detached from history but suddenly part of it.

A FEAST OF CANNIBALS

'Suspicious meat', testicle platters and pickled penises were among the delicacies on offer...

James David Russell, 39, was arrested for the murder of David Flaget, 70, after Flaget's remains were found upside down in the passenger seat of his car outside Russell's home in Clark Fort, Idaho. On further investigation, police found that parts of Flaget's body were missing, and on searching Russell's house discovered a bloodstained microwave, glass bowl and knife, as well as what they describe as "a thermal artefact" – a body part to which heat has been applied. They also found "a cleanup kit" used to dispose of remains and evidence, but did not find all the missing remains. As a result, prosecutors added the charge of cannibalism to that of murder, the first time that it has been used in the state. On being questioned, Russell admitted eating some of Flaget's remains, saying that he believed he could "heal himself by cutting off portions of flesh" in order to "cure his brain". Investigating detective Philip Bonner said: "It wasn't the bloodiest crime scene, but it's more of the psychological, 'What the heck is going on here?' and 'Why am I picking up pieces?' It's a walk down the dark path that we don't see very often." *bonnerferryherald.com, 17 Dec 2021.*

TOP LEFT: James David Russell ate David Flaget to "cure his brain". **ABOVE RIGHT**: Cuddly couple Bob Lee Allen and Thomas Evans Gates apparently have a taste for testicles. **ABOVE LEFT**: "Eunuch Maker" Marius Gustavson.

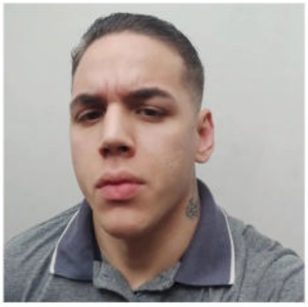
● In Oklahoma, Bob Lee Allen, 54, and his husband Thomas Evans Gates III, 42, were arrested for illegally castrating a man, then allegedly saying that they were going to eat the severed testicles. Their victim, an unnamed 28-year-old from Virginia, had willingly gone to the couple to have the procedure carried out after contacting them on an Internet forum called "Eunuch Maker" where Allen had claimed to have 15 years' experience in gender reassignment surgery. They took the man to a secluded cabin in the woods and carried out a two-hour procedure to remove his testicles, using only local anæsthetic. Afterwards, Allen reportedly said, "that he was going to consume the parts and laughed and said that he was a cannibal." They could not control the post-operative bleeding, however, so took the man to hospital, where staff called police. They arrested Allen and Gates when they tried to visit the man later, and, on searching their properties, found a freezer containing body parts (presumably more testicles) and a list of six further men who had signed up for castration. Police believe it is likely that the men had kept the testicles to consume, but could not prove it, so charged them with performing unlicensed surgery, conspiracy to commit unlicensed surgery, maiming and assault, and battery with a dangerous weapon. *nypost.com, 22 Sept 2021.*

● The man behind the "Eunuch Maker" forum, Marius Gustavson, 46, has been jailed for a minimum of 22 years after being prosecuted at London's Old Bailey. During the court case, the website was described as a "busy and lucrative" business estimated to have taken more than £300,000 between 2017 and 2021 and to have had 22,841 paying subscribers across the world. Prosecutor Caroline Carberry KC told the court that there was "clear evidence" of cannibalism and that Gustavson had cooked testicles for lunch and served them on an "artfully arranged salad platter". Gustavson also sold body parts from his flat, believed to be for cannibalistic purposes. One witness described seeing a man turning up at Gustavson's flat and being sold something in a jar that was taken from a small fridge kept behind the sofa. Asked about it, the witness said Gustavson replied ,"Oh yes, this is someone's penis, this nice little twentysomething from Belgium." The witness also added, "But he didn't come back in with lots of cash. He used the money to buy pizza." Another witness confirmed this, saying: "In that fridge there were testicles and chopped-off penises pickled in a jar and kept cold, and people would turn up to buy them." Gustavson also sold body parts from his website, . Although the removal of body parts was consensual, Gustavson was described as an "arch manipulator" of people and, as neither he nor any of his co-accused had medical

LEFT: Resendo Tellez, chomping on a leg. **BELOW LEFT**: Begolea Mendes Fernandes; "suspicious meat" was found in his luggage.

qualifications, their "surgery" was said to be "little short of human butchery". One of the witnesses, who had undergone extreme body modification at the hands of Gustavson, admitted that his mental state at the time meant he had needed to see a psychiatrist, "not a back-street surgeon", adding, "I realise I have trusted a wrong person and Gustavson is in fact a lunatic." *BBC News; theguardian.com, 9 May 2024.*

• Police in Las Vegas, Nevada, arrested Colin Czech, 29, after an incident at a bus stop in the city. Witnesses had called police when they saw Czech attack Kenneth Brown, throwing him to the ground and "eating his face". Arriving at the scene, police found Brown "unresponsive and bleeding from the head" and Czech with "biological matter in his hair, mouth and on his clothing". Brown was found to have a large wound on his head and to be missing an eye and an ear and was later pronounced dead in hospital. Czech claimed that Brown had attacked him, and that he had been awake for "five days straight" because he was "possessed", admitting that he had "used his teeth to eat [Brown's] eyeballs and ears". Although charged with murder, Public Defender David Westbrook requested a medical examination for Czech as he believed he is incompetent to stand trial. *metro.co.uk, 1 May 2024.*



• Following an incident in which a man was struck and killed by a train at Wasco station, near Bakersfield in California, a passer-by was videoed removing a severed leg from the track and making off with it. He is seen picking up the leg, sniffing it and then taking bites out of it, before walking away swinging the severed limb. "He was waving a person's leg. And he started chewing on it over there, he was biting it and he was hitting it against the wall and everything," said Jose Ibarra, who witnessed the incident. Police identified the man as Resendo Tellez, 27, who was later arrested by police for multiple outstanding warrants, taking evidence from the scene and mutilating human remains. In a statement, officers said they believed drug use was involved. *timesnownews.com, 23 Mar; abxnews4.com, 4 Apr 2024.*

• When immigration officials at Lisbon airport apprehended a man trying to enter Portugal because they were suspicious about the legality of his Italian ID card, they found he was Begolea Mendes Fernandes, 26, wanted on suspicion of murdering 21-year-old Alan Lopes in Amsterdam a few days earlier. Lopes had been found dead at the house he shared with his mother and sister, and Dutch police had found evidence of cannibalism at the scene. Searching Fernandes's luggage, officers found a package containing what they described as "suspicious meat", as well as bloody clothes. DNA testing identified the "meat" as human, but also showed that it was not from Lopes, and it was not clear who else it could have come from. Portuguese authorities detained Fernandes in a psychiatric hospital pending extradition to the Netherlands. *D.Express, 3 Mar 2024.*

• Alex Kwong, the 28-year-old ex-husband of popular Hong Kong model and influencer Abby Choi, was arrested trying to leave the city by boat four days after Choi was reported missing. His parents and elder brother had been arrested a day earlier after a police search discovered Choi's headless body at their house in Lung Mei village. Officers also found some of her remains in a fridge and a skull and human tissue in two pots of stew, but continued to search for missing body parts. "We believe the victim and her ex-husband's family had many financial disputes involving huge sums," said police superintendent Alan Chung. "Someone was dissatisfied with how the victim handled her assets, which became a motive to kill." *BBC News, 25 Feb 2023.*

• Ten years after he killed and ate a fishing companion (**FT298:4**), police in Russia caught up with Alexei Gorulenko, 46. In summer 2012, Gorulenko and his friend Andrei Kurochkin had become trapped in dense frozen forest along with two other men when their car sank in a river during a fishing trip in Yakutia, Siberia, leaving them cut off from the outside world. Rescuers didn't find the men until November, by which time Gorulenko and Alexander Abdullaev were the only survivors. A third member of the fishing party, Viktor Komarov, went missing after reportedly wandering off into the thick forest and getting lost. Kurochkin, though, was beaten to death by Gorulenko, who dismembered the body and ate it with Abdullaev after they had run out of food. Gorulenko was convicted of causing grievous bodily harm resulting in death by negligence in 2014, but fled after being sentenced to 12 years in a maximum-security prison colony, and spent the next 10 years hiding in remote fishing camps and abandoned houses in Russia's far east and Siberia. He was eventually recaptured when he visited a relative in Eremeevka, a village in south-western Russia. He is awaiting trial for his escape and will also be required to serve his original sentence. As there is no law against cannibalism in Russia, Abdullaev escaped punishment for his part in Kurochkin's demise. *thesun.co.uk, 15 Mar 2024.*

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

As reports of Noam Chomsky's death prove to be exaggerated and the 'new Nostradamus' predicts a Summer Solstice start for World War III, **NOEL ROONEY** feels the fear…

PROMISED END

In a world where Noam Chomsky has become an avatar of Schroedinger's cat, or a straight man to Mark Twain, anything might happen. But then, in a world where Nigel Farage is seen by some as a looming saviour, anything is probably obliged to happen. Given our imminent ingestion by AI (when did computers get hungry?) and the scheduled arrival of bird flu, one might argue there is not much room for poor anything to get a doom-laden word in edgeways. But there is always room for another little shot of fear.

'Edgeways' may be an apt description for the diction of Kushal Kumar, dubbed the 'new Nostradamus' by some of his supporters and no doubt his marketing department. Mr Kumar recently predicted the outbreak of World War III, more or less coinciding with the Summer Solstice ('more or less', because, like all durable prophets, Kumar has left himself a little celestial wiggle room). And it's going to start right here in Blighty, by his account and the venerable evidence of Vedic astrology.

He has corroboration too, from that Western bastion of prediction, remote viewing. Daz Smith, a remote viewer with a decent reputation (in his field at least), has seen a "first strike of some kind" happening towards the end of June. This is clearly not a reference to English footballing hopes. Perhaps we should ask him if Chomsky is alive or not.

At which point, if one were of a conspiratorial frame of mind, recent action by Just Stop Oil might become relevant. The eco-activist movement (another good candidate for the 'looming saviour' mantle, perhaps) chose the date of Kumar's prediction to spray orange paint all over Stonehenge.

JUST STOP OIL

Maybe they have secretly changed their name to Just Stop Everything

Just in time for the Solstice, of course; but also just in time for WWIII? Maybe they have secretly changed their name to Just Stop Everything.

So if we find ourselves being extras in a Mad Max movie we didn't make, we can play out the big set piece around the hole where Stonehenge used to be until Vlad the Invader pressed the button marked 'map of karma'. That, apparently, is how Kumar defines Vedic astrology; but it could equally serve as a motto for the much-publicised intentions of those evil Russians to blow us all to the extreme right (much publicised everywhere except Russia, needless to say).

Whether one requires a map of karma to predict a global conflict is moot. More mundane evidence is, after all, scary enough for the most avid of doom-scrollers. The world is currently hosting the largest number of conflicts since WWII; the conflict in Gaza threatens to spread to the wider region; the conflict in Ukraine has the potential to do the same; the litany of terror that denotes business as usual is in overdrive, and in some quarters it appears the correct political response is to egg it on.

This makes the rumours that Emmanuel Macron, the less than universally popular President of France, is considering adopting special powers in the event the snap election doesn't go his way, a little more interesting. This hasn't happened in France since de Gaulle invoked the relevant legislation (Article 16) after the failed putsch by disgruntled fellow generals. Macron's has been the loudest European voice in favour of NATO intervention in Ukraine, and there are rumours aplenty that French troops are already in country. As one witty online poster had it: "It didn't work out too well when Napoleon did it, but some great music came out of it." Quite.

An oblique sliver of mildly woo-woo redemption came from a woman who claimed her three-day NDE included a symposium with higher beings (a "white and shimmery figure" by her own account) that tried to persuade her we are in a golden age and have been since 2012. Ah yes, 2012; you all remember how that worked out.

So here's the pickle: media midwits (I don't usually enjoy neologisms but this one seems apt; it's best understood as a person of middling intellect who identifies as an expert) are lining up to tell us our time is at hand. Equally, the conspiracist community is awash with folks predicting the end, the end times, etc. Life is confusing enough, goodness knows; but when the Establishment opinion-making apparatus lines up so neatly with the nut job conspiracy theorists, what is a sceptic supposed to think?

There is a broader point here. It appears that, in the field of fearmongering at least (AI, extreme weather, the next pandemic) there is some element of consensus between the orthodox and the mavericks. Is this a symptom of the mainstream being contaminated by the Conspirasphere? It might be. It might also be an indication that both points of view reside at an equal (if not identical) distance from the truth, if that quaint term has any remaining cachet.

Or, more worryingly, might it imply precisely the opposite? Perhaps this is how we know that the time really is at hand; when the lion and the lamb bleat in the same pathetic voice.

https://metro.co.uk/2024/05/24/new-nostradamus-predicts-exact-date-world-war-iii-will-start-20904343/; www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw44mdee0zzo; https://metro.co.uk/2024/06/13/woman-died-told-future-humanity-not-expect-21019158/?ico=trending-post-strip_item_4; www.sott.net/article/492381-Macron-Allegedly-Considers-Adopting-Emergency-Powers-After-July-7th-Election-Results

MORE MERCILESS MINGS

Mystery smells and puzzling pongs continue to make life a misery from Flintshire to Finland

13 INVESTIGATES
DEC RELEASE NEW FINDINGS ON FOUL SMELL
13

ABOVE: Albany, the birthplace of Charles Fort, has been plagued by a foul, flatulent stench.

FROM FORT TO FART

Charles Fort's birthplace of Albany, New York, is in the grip of a foul and untraceable odour that has been causing residents to gag since September last year. Described as a horrible combination of urine and flatulence, the smell appears to be strongest in the North Albany neighbourhood around the Interstate 787 and Interstate 90 interchange and varies in intensity depending on the weather. Despite investigations by the Department of Environmental Conservation, the origin of the stench has proved impossible to pinpoint, although prime suspects are a local composting facility, low tide from nearby lakes or the Hudson River exposing anoxic mud, and the county's water purification and sewage treatment plant. *nypost.com, 30 Mar 2024.*

MALODOROUS MUXTON

Since January, villagers in Muxton, Shropshire, have been suffering from an "overpowering" waste smell with a chemical undertone. "It really smacks you in the face. It comes and goes, and it is difficult to describe, but when you leave the house, it is really noticeable," said village resident Laura Stoner. "Some days it is so bad that it triggers migraines or headaches for me, and I had to take two weeks off work because of it." She says that the stink sometimes makes it impossible for her to hang washing out, as it ends up picking up the smell. Stoner has tried to complain but found that the local Telford and Wrekin Council website doesn't appear to have anywhere to report smells. Danny Vurlan, 28, has also ended up with migraines from the "grim" smell, which he says is sometimes so bad it makes him gag. "It's just horrendous and I'm worried for our health. After a bit of time, it starts giving you a headache," he said. Some locals have pointed the finger at a local landfill site, while others in the village have suggested it might originate from a newly built council estate nearby. Parish Council chairman Iain Alexander, though, pours cold water on the landfill theory, saying, "We do often get smells from farmers when they are spreading on their fields, but I don't think it can be from the landfill site as that is more than five miles away." *uk.news.yahoo.com, 20 Feb 2024.*

> *"It's just horrendous and I'm worried for our health"*

FINNISH FUNK

Finland's capital Helsinki has also been beset by an evil stench. The odour has been afflicting people over an area of at least 60km (37 miles) along Finland's southern coastline and resembles sulphur or burnt rubber. Helsinki's rescue department said, "In Helsinki and Uusimaa more widely, a strong smell in the air has been noticed from time to time. The rescue service and other authorities are currently investigating the matter," adding, "According to the current information from the air quality measurements of the Finnish Meteorological Institute, the smell does not pose a health risk." The smell is also affecting neighbouring parts of Russia, with several areas of St Petersburg reporting a persistent and horrible pong. St Petersburg resident Dasha Nukolova said, "It reached Vasilyevsky Island. It smells like a mixture of garbage, burnt rubber and burning. I woke up from the smell at 7am, and closed all the windows." Masha Artamonova said "At Primorskaya there's a terrible smell, like gas. I woke up with a headache and couldn't breathe." However, the Russian Environmental Management Committee denied that monitoring stations had recorded anything above the permitted levels of air pollution. *independent.co.uk, 31 Mar 2024.*

WELSH WHIFF

The "Flintshire smell" in North Wales is described as "smelling like a damp mop" and regularly wafts across an area from Sandy Croft to Queensferry and Connah's Quay. As with the other smells, it seems to be impossible to find its source, despite Flintshire Council employing consultants to track it down, but as the area contains several industrial estates, a water treatment plant and a river, they are not short of possibilities. Local councillor Paula Titley said "We're entitled to fresh air. I mean, as soon as I get up in the morning, I come to get the milk off the doorstep and if you can smell it, it's going to be one of them days, you know, where you can't open your windows, you can't put your washing out. It's just awful for everybody." Pat Leach from Mancot added, "Sometimes it's stronger than others. But it's just there all the time. We're all suffering – we don't know what we're breathing in." *itv.com, 3 May 2024.*

SWEDISH STINK

In Sweden, a mysterious smell at security service headquarters had rather more dramatic effects. First reported as a suspected gas leak, there were later reports that sensors on the building's roof had detected phosgene. This is a substance mainly used in the manufacture of plastics and pesticides today, but during WWI it was used as a chemical weapon, causing the majority of gassing deaths. Emergency services launched a major operation; 500 people were evacuated from the area, a nearby motorway exit was closed and barriers were set up hundreds of metres around the building, patrolled by police wearing gas masks. People in buildings nearby were told to keep their windows closed. Six people were sent to hospital with breathing difficulties, including several police officers who had "noticed a smell when they arrived at the scene", and two others admitted themselves later. Despite this, security services later said that no unusual gas had been detected inside or outside the building and police have launched an investigation into the cause of the alert. *BBC News, 23 Feb 2024.*

ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL GARDEN

KARL SHUKER considers the latest *Gigantopithecus* research and an online AI crypto-fake

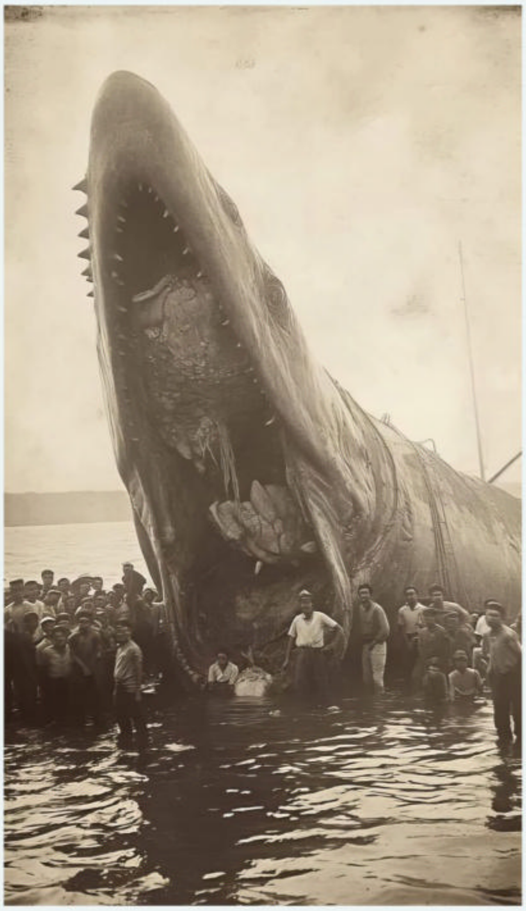
DATING GIGANTOPITHECUS

One perennially popular identity proposed by cryptozoologists for North America's bigfoot (sasquatch) and especially for the largest variety of Asian yeti (should any of these cryptids exist, that is!) is a surviving population of the prehistoric giant ape *Gigantopithecus blacki*, closely related to today's orang-utan species. This identity has been looked upon favourably because of traditional palæontological researches suggesting that this largest of all known ape species survived until at least as recently as 200,000 years ago. However, it has now received a chronological setback, due to new researches indicating that *Gigantopithecus* may actually have died out as far back in time as 300,000 years ago. This mega-ape (twice as big as any living species) is currently known from four isolated fossil mandibles (lower jawbones) and numerous fossil teeth but no other skeletal remains of any kind, and all of these have been uncovered only in a few caves in southern China, nowhere else. So it is nothing if not an enigmatic species.

Consequently, in a bid to learn more about its habits and date of extinction, palæoanthropologist Prof. Yingqi Zhang of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing has led a team of researchers subjecting some of this species' fossils to an array of different dating techniques in order to determine its habits, diet, and environment. Their findings imply that when southern China's habitat changed dramatically about 700,000 to 600,000 years ago, *Gigantopithecus* couldn't adapt to its new surroundings quickly enough, slowly dwindling in numbers until extinction finally claimed it there around 300,000 years ago.

So is that also the death knell for the *Gigantopithecus* hypothesis regarding the identity of the yeti? Not necessarily, for as opined by Dr Hervé Bocherens (a biogeologist at Germany's University of Tübingen) with regard to the Chinese team's researches, documenting the extinction of this species from its notoriously fragmentary fossil record is fraught with risk, so it's impossible to rule out the possibility that pockets of *Gigantopithecus* lingered in still-undiscovered caves for longer. This opinion is obviously supported by the current absence of any procured post-cranial *Gigantopithecus* fossils, despite this species being so sizeable. Perhaps, therefore, some will turn up in regions far from any that have hitherto revealed fossils of it (indeed, potential but as yet unconfirmed examples have already been reported from Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam), and perhaps be younger than the presently-known southern Chinese remains. Who knows, might some even be disinterred in regions where the yeti has been reported…? How very intriguing that would be!

www.sciencenews.org/article/largest-ape-extinct-earlier-than-thought; www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06900-0



LEFT: The photo of "Hoggie' that circulated online in May.

HOAXING HOGGIE

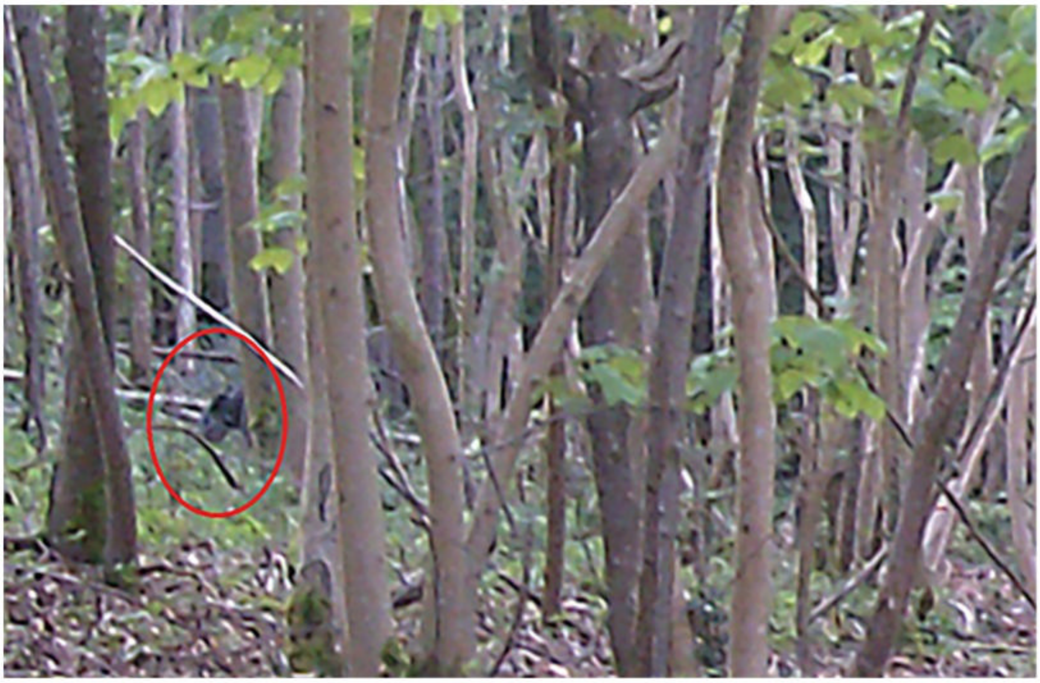
As if cryptozoology were not hampered enough by traditional photographic fakes and digitally-modified image trickery, it now has to contend with pictorial hoaxes of the AI-generated kind too. Rarely a day goes by without encountering new examples online – who hasn't seen, for instance, the seemingly unending array of outlandish bigfoot-themed AI images? (Thankfully, AI has yet to master the art of accurately portraying paws, hands, and feet in particular, so normally a quick look at these depicted appendages is sufficient to unmask these photographic phonies.) But what about monsters that lack these anatomical accoutrements? One such example came my way recently when it went viral online during early May 2024 – namely, the dramatic black and white image reproduced here, original source unknown (as always!). It supposedly constitutes a "famous photo" snapped one day in 1930 that depicts Hoggie, the "legendary Hogganfield Loch monster which was finally captured after many years of folk diubting [sic] its existence", at least according to the caption that invariably accompanies its appearances online.

It is certainly a very dramatic photograph, yet was completely new to me, someone who has spent over 40 years in full-time cryptozoological research, scouring and meticulously perusing countless books and articles on mystery beasts of every kind; so why had I never once encountered it anywhere if it was that famous? In any case, the monster in it was preposterously enormous. So I did some online digging, and discovered that although allegedly dating back to 1930, this visually remarkable, unforgettable picture's earliest appearance online was apparently as recent as 25 October 2023. Why not much earlier if it were indeed genuine? Also, I noticed that the faces of various people standing alongside this behemoth of a beast seemed blurred or distorted, a characteristic AI giveaway. Equally significant was that whereas Hogganfield Loch is itself definitely real (it is actually a kettle pond situated in Hogganfield, a district of the city of Glasgow in Scotland), I have been unable to find any history of Hoggie, captured or uncaptured, so it seems to be as dubious as its depiction! Finally, I subsequently encountered a very detailed analysis of this photo compiled by fellow investigator Aleksandra Wrona that had been published online by Yahoo News that confirmed its AI origin beyond any shadow of a doubt. In short, this monstrous photo was not so much Hoggie as hogwash!

https://uk.news.yahoo.com/fact-check-alleged-1930-pic-202800005.html 6 May 2024.

THE BIG CAT RETURNS

An encounter in a caravan park, trail cam photos and a new DNA test all point to leopards on the loose


ANDY RULE / SWNS

ABOVE: The trail cam set up by Andy and Claire Rule has captured numerous images of what might be a big cat.

THE CAT AND THE CARAVAN

John Broomhead, 68, from Aintree, Merseyside, regularly takes his caravan to Tansley in Derbyshire for holidays with his partner and recently decided to go public with a startling experience he had there in July 2022. The couple would frequently host barbecues at the site, and, Broomhead says: "It was just a normal day. We'd been having a nice evening with friends but at around 11pm, we decided to call it a night and I went to put out the fire. I heard a rustling noise, but obviously thought nothing of it. In the corner of my eye, I could see a black shadow moving; at first, I thought it could have been a dog or a cat – but it was huge." He estimated the animal's size as "three or four times the size of a regular cat, maybe a similar size to a Doberman dog. Its eyes were bright yellow, and it had a long tail – I couldn't believe what I was seeing, some sort of cougar or leopard." He thought it was preparing to attack him. "Before I knew it, the eyes were coming towards me. In what felt like an instant, the cat had moved from 40 yards [37m] away to about half that distance." He "hurled himself" into the caravan and says "I feared for my life in the split second that thing was charging at me. If I didn't get away, I'm certain it could have killed me." He acknowledges that this seems an unlikely tale and says that his partner would not have believed him had he not been so shaken by the experience. However, Broomhead says, he later found other people who had seen the animal, although he did not note down their names or any other details about them. "I met another man in the caravan park, and we spoke about what I saw. He described the exact same animal to me, and it was just down the road," he said. "Another person said they saw a mangled carcass on a bike track nearby; no cat, dog or fox in this country could've done that much damage." Broomhead says that he has been permanently traumatised by the event and now refuses to go to the toilet or shower block at the campsite alone after dark, as he still fears that the animal might return and attack him. *derbytelegraph.co.uk, 13 Jun 2024.*

> *"I did a double-take and realised it was a black cat"*

MORE LEOPARD DNA

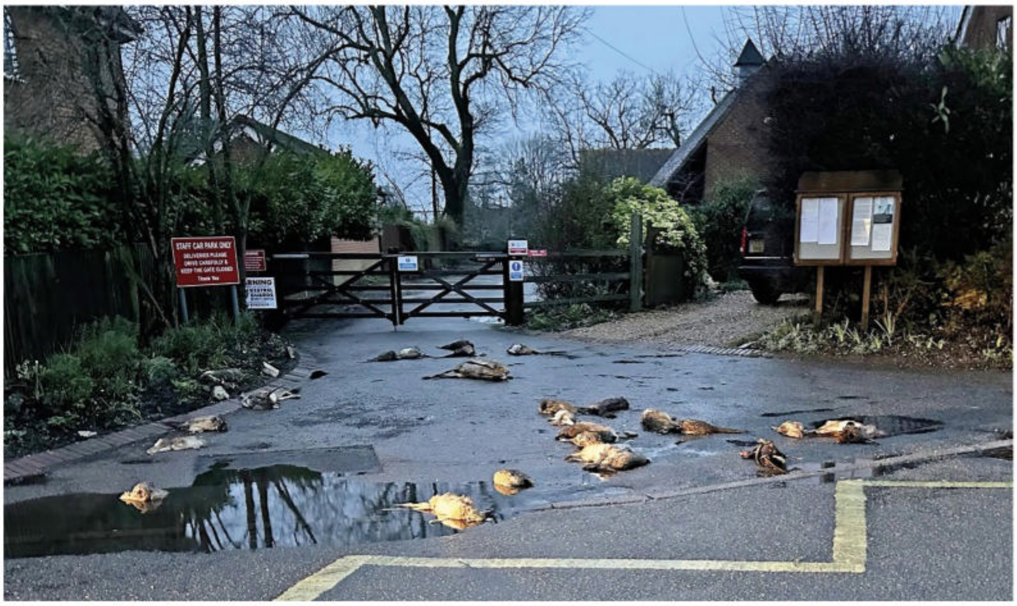
With hairs found on a Gloucestershire farm in 2023 (**FT433:4-5**) and in woodland near Woolsery in Devon in 2010 (**FT267:4**) testing positive for DNA from the leopard, *Panthera pardus*, definitive proof that such cats are loose in the British countryside seemed to be imminent. Now, a third DNA test has brought that even closer. In October last year, Sharon Larkin-Snowden disturbed a big cat feeding on a fresh sheep carcass on a Cumbrian hill farm, the exact location of which has not been disclosed. The body was fresh and only some of the internal organs had been eaten. "To my right, I saw something black running, and assumed it was a sheepdog," she said. "Then I did a double-take and realised it was a black cat. It ran towards a stone wall, stopped and then jumped the wall. It was big – the size of a German shepherd dog." Larkin-Snowden then took swabs from the sheep's nose and legs and sent them to Professor Robin Allanby, who has specialised in testing for big cat DNA and was involved in the previous positive leopard identifications. Allanby was able to separate the predator's DNA from that of the sheep, and positively identified it as coming from a cat of the *Panthera* genus. Only two members of this genus have a black, or melanistic, form, the leopard and the jaguar, both of which are about the size of the animal glimpsed by Larkin-Snowden. This is the first confirmation of big cat DNA taken from an alleged kill in Britain, so reinforces the case for a big cat presence, as hair finds are always open to the accusation that they were taken from elsewhere and planted at the scene of their discovery, whereas it is much harder to plant DNA on a carcass. *countryfile.com, 15 May 2024.*

TRAIL CAM CATS

Following the Gloucester DNA discovery, Andy Rule, 53, and wife Claire, 50, have spent time attempting to photograph the cat, or indeed, cats, that may live in the area, regularly staking the area out with trail cams. They believe that their efforts have borne fruit, although the images, taken in Stanley Woods near Nympsfield, Gloucestershire, are not the clearest. Andy Rule says, "We've had three cameras over half a mile that have picked up glimpses, in that area. What I believe [the cat] is doing is sniffing the ground." They captured several cat images. "Between the first image of the tail and the side profile there was 53 seconds. If it had been a video, it would have caught it moving more fluently," says Rule. "Most of the images we've caught are pure luck because the cats are scooting around the edges of them." *metro.co.uk, 7 Jun 2024.*

THE DARK STUFF

The plague of animal mutilations and killings continues in the New Forest, plus grisly finds at the Wolf's Lair and witchy crimes



ABOVE: Dead animals, including pheasants, hares and a decapitated deer were placed by the gates of Awbridge Primary School in Romsey. **BELOW:** The bodies of 50 dead hares were left outside the community shop in Broughton.

OCCULT CRIMEWAVE

Hampshire, and particularly the New Forest area, remains in the grip of a grisly plague of allegedly occult animal killing and mutilation. In 2019 St Peter's Church in Bramshaw had "Satanic" symbols painted on its door and mutilated animal corpses repeatedly left in the churchyard (**FT389:4-5**). In 2020 this was followed by sadistic attacks on local sheep and cows which saw a ewe stabbed to death and left with a crude hay cross and a broken pitchfork beside it, and another killed and sprayed with a pentagram (**FT391:18**). In 2023 five pig hearts surrounded by candles were left on a marker stone at Stagbury Hill, a local Bronze Age monument (**FT434:7**). This led to a fruitless police search for alleged "Satanists", although the deaths and mutilations appeared to be related more to horror film imagery rather than actual ritual. Meanwhile, the crimes have continued.

In January, a dead deer was found suspended by a rope from a tree in Eling Recreation Ground in Totton in an apparently deliberate display, and in February, 20 dead animals, including rabbits, pheasants, hares and a decapitated deer were found "carefully placed" outside the gates of Awbridge Primary School in Romsey. Shortly afterwards, the bodies of 50 hares were left outside the community shop in Broughton, along with a dead owl and a kestrel, whose carcasses were "stuffed" on the shop's door handles, while blood was also smeared on the windows.

Later, a burned-out car thought to be related to the incident was discovered, leading to the arrest of two men suspected of poaching and wildlife crimes. Their actions were being interpreted by some as a warning to local communities from poaching gangs, of which the men were allegedly members, although they were later released without charge.

Meanwhile, the deaths and mutilations continue. On 8 May, a deer's severed head and an inverted wooden cross were left on top of a stone celebrating the Millennium in the centre of Burley village, home to renowned witch Sybil Leek in the 1950s. The next day, in nearby Cadnam, where the sheep carcass was daubed with a pentagram in 2019, a flock of sheep was brutally attacked. Six ewes and lambs were stabbed; two were left alive but with their intestines hanging out and had to be put down, others had their throats cut. Two survived, but their condition was reported as "touch and go". Farmer Andrew Parry-Norton, who owned the sheep, said, "I think that somebody has got this grudge against sheep, as bizarre as it sounds. It's almost like they don't understand that this is not a computer game and there are actual consequences;, you can't just go around killing sheep."

As with previous offences, there seem to have been no sightings of anyone who could have been responsible, or any clues that might lead police to the culprit or culprits.

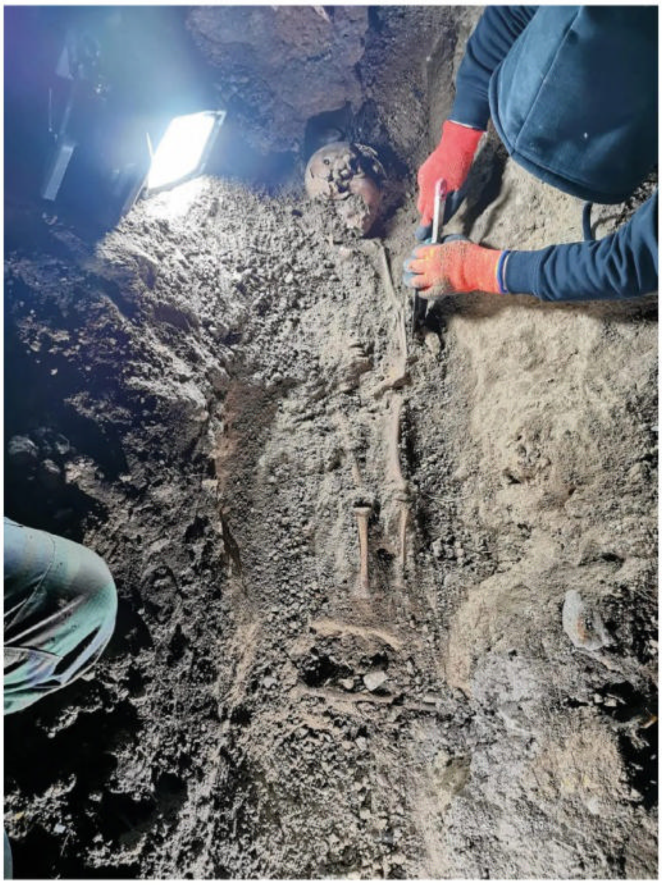
Chris White, who works in Shappen Stores in Burley, and who removed the severed deer's head from the Millennium Stone, said that there were rumours that the latest animal attacks were linked to a recent Green Man parade, but added: "There is no evidence to suggest it was, but everyone is clutching at straws." Parry-Norton said: "It is disturbing that these attacks happen. Where does it end?". *dailyecho.co.uk, 12 Jan; metro.co.uk, 10 Feb, 10 May; hampshirechronicle.co.uk, 17 Mar; theguardian.com, 29 Mar, 20 May; D.Mirror, 11 May 2024.*

CRIMINAL WITCHCRAFT

A freedom of information request to British police has led to claims that the country is suffering a surge in "criminal witchcraft", based on 175 reports of occult crime being made to police since 2018. These include a report to Merseyside Police that a suspect forced a victim to "use a voodoo doll and perform black magic on others", while West Mercia Police dealt with someone sending letters threatening to use voodoo to harm people. Humberside Police apparently received reports of more than 60 occult crimes, including six people saying curses had caused them to "lose control of their bodies", while in North Wales, police dealt with a man threatening to use black magic on his probation officer. It seems most reports were dismissed, as formal investigations and prosecution would not be in the public interest, while a small number resulted in mental health professionals becoming involved, although there were some prosecutions on domestic abuse grounds. *Sun, 22 Apr 2024.*

NAZI SACRIFICE?

Located amidst dense woodland in what is now northeast Poland, the bunker complex known as "The Wolf's Lair" was where Hitler and other senior Nazis spent much of World War II. Containing 200 houses and other buildings, it was destroyed by the German military in January



JENS HFALEK / RELIKTE DER GESCHICHTE

ABOVE: Polish police officers uncovered skeletons in what was once Hermann Goering's house in the Nazi complex known as "The Wolf's Lair".

1945 as they fled the Red Army. Today it is a vast moss-covered ruin that has been the subject of long-term investigation by a Gdansk-based team of local amateur archæologists. Over the years, their efforts have turned up crockery, weapons tools and other everyday items of Nazi life, but in February their investigations took adarker, unexpected, turn.

Entering the house once inhabited by Hermann Goering and his family, they noticed a concrete ledge that once supported a wooden floor and, hoping to find the nails that had held this together, they started digging. Instead of nails, though, they found a human skull, which brought their work to an abrupt halt as they called in the police. Forensic investigators then excavated the space behind the ledge, finding five human skeletons in all: three adults, a teenager and a newborn baby resting between an adult's shin bones.

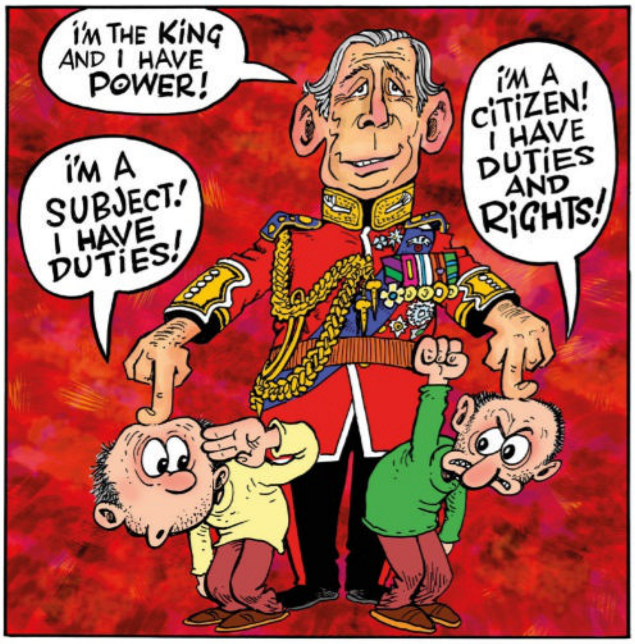
All appeared to have been buried naked and all of them were missing their hands and feet. Even stranger, scattered around the skeletons were numerous "thunderstones" – bullet-shaped fossils known as belemnites, the remains of ancient squid.

It appears that the skeletons are contemporary with the Nazi occupation of the site and not a later secret burial, and the presence of the thunderstones, which in Germanic mythology have a protective function, suggests that their interment may have had some sort of ritual purpose. It is thought that the victims could be a foundation sacrifice to protect those who lived in the house. Oktavian Bartoszewski, one of the team that made the grisly find, said "Goering and other Nazis believed in the occult, so perhaps these people were sacrificed. A find like this gives you goosebumps." *D.Mail, 6 May 2024.*

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

281: SUBJECT OR CITIZEN?


I'M THE KING AND I HAVE POWER!
I'M A SUBJECT! I HAVE DUTIES!
I'M A CITIZEN! I HAVE DUTIES AND RIGHTS!

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

We British live under a constitution so archaic that we are not even citizens – we are mere subjects of the crown.

The "truth"

Unusually for this column, the truth in this case is incontrovertible: we're citizens. Furthermore, we're not subjects. (By "we," I'm referring to those of us who qualify as UK citizens under the various legal criteria, having either had citizenship automatically conferred on us at birth or acquiring it later.) Through many centuries, especially following the French Revolution, the competing concepts of subjecthood and citizenship battled for supremacy, the difference essentially being that subjects have duties whereas citizens have rights and duties. The term citizen first appears in the legislation in the British Nationality Act 1948, mainly to differentiate citizens of the UK from subjects in the Commonwealth. Final clarity comes with the British Nationality Act 1981, effective from 1983, under which the "we" referred to above are all citizens. A British citizen is someone who has automatic right of residence in the UK. A British subject can apply to become a citizen; a citizen cannot become a subject. Today there are few remaining subjects; it's a specific category which involves limited rights short of actual citizenship.

Sources

www.gov.uk/types-of-british-nationality/british-subject; www.gov.uk/government/publications/historical-background-information-on-nationality/; https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/british-nationality-subject-citizen/

Disclaimer

You could argue that we remain "subjects" of the king in some undefined sense as long as we have a monarchy. But in terms of legal definition, before the 1948 Act we were all subjects and since 1 January 1983 our nationality status is that of citizen, not subject.

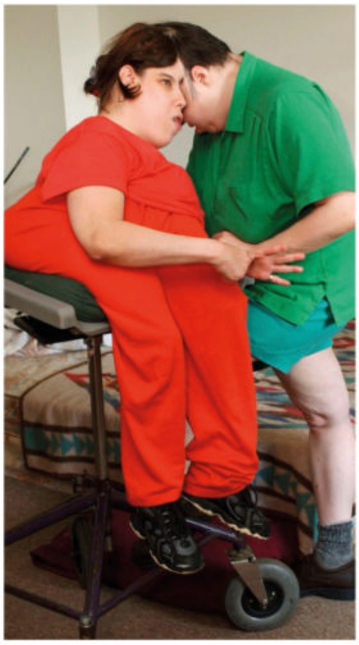
Mythchaser

In police thrillers, the cops are always keen to interview eyewitnesses as soon as possible. An FT reader was told that this practice is changing due to research suggesting that immediate witness statements are less reliable than those given a few days later. Is this true? Tell us when you've had time to ponder.

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to Hollywood's legendary "King of the B-Movie" and to a pair of extraordinary conjoined twins

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE LEFT: Roger Corman on the set of *The Raven* with Peter Lorre, Vincent Price and William Baskin. **ABOVE RIGHT**: George (left) and Lori Schappell in 2002.

ROGER CORMAN

Roger Corman, who has died at 98, blazed a trail through cinema as "King of the B-Movie", first as a director, then as a producer, churning out cheap, fast and lurid quickies with titles like *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *Teenage Caveman*, *Caged Heat!*, *Ski Troop Attack* and *Night of the Cobra Woman*. Later, for the SyFy Channel, he made films like *Sharktopus* and *Piranhaconda*. Corman saw himself as a craftsman rather than an artist and his philosophy was "make 'em quick, make 'em cheap and make 'em popular" – it clearly worked, as when he came to write his autobiography it was called *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime*. His films found favour on the drive-in circuit and later on late-night psychotronic TV due to their schlocky production values, energy, verve and complete disregard for anything resembling good taste – in one film a character is raped to death by a giant worm-monster.

He was born in Detroit to a family of Russian-Jewish and German ancestry, but they soon moved to California where Corman attended Beverly Hills High School before going on to study engineering at Stanford University. After military service he started at 20th Century Fox as an errand boy, but used the GI Bill to study English at Oxford University, then lived in Paris for six months. On his return in 1954 he sold a low-budget script to Allied Artists and his career as a film maker was underway. Corman directed 55 films and produced some 385 more between 1954 and 2008, along the way helping launch the careers of the directors Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich, Francis Ford Coppola, Monte Hellman, Paul Bartell, Joe Dante, James Cameron, Timur Bekmambetov and Jonathan Demme. Many actors got their first breaks with Corman too, including Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda, William Shatner, Robert De Niro, Bruce Dern, Charles Bronson, Dennis Hopper, Tommy Lee Jones, Talia Shire, Sandra Bullock, and David Carradine. In among the quickies, though, there were some genuine classics, including the ultimate road movie, *Death Race 2000*, the original *Little Shop of Horrors* and a series of elegantly executed camp and colourful Edgar Allen Poe adaptations featuring Vincent Price, including *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Masque of the Red Death*. Later in the 1960s he made the biker film *Wild Angels*, and the drugsploitation movie *The Trip*, both of which starred Peter Fonda, with the latter being written by Jack Nicholson. These were the inspiration for Nicholson and Fonda's epochal *Easy Rider*. "You can see right away that the guy's a superior producer," Nicholson said. "He's the best producer I've met in the business. The man carried me for seven years. I feel tremendously indebted to him."

In contrast to his own film output, Corman also ran a distribution company which brought many of the best and most sophisticated international films to the US circuit, including Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*, Fellini's *Amarcord* and Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala*. In person, Corman came over as well spoken, elegant and cultured with nothing to suggest his connection to the fervid film subculture he almost single-handedly created.

Roger William Corman, film maker; born Detroit, 5 April 1926; died Santa Monica, 9 May 2024, aged 98.

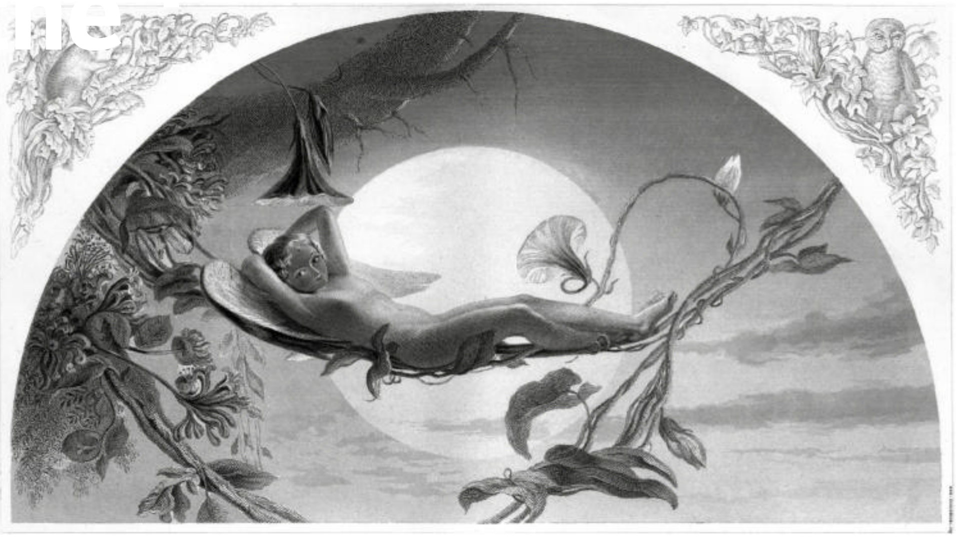
LORI AND GEORGE SCHAPPELL

Even by the standards of conjoined twins, Lori and George Schappell led extraordinary lives. The twins had separate brains, but their skulls were connected, making them particularly unusual; few conjoined twins have connected skulls, the majority, around 75 per cent, are joined at the chest, and many of the rest join at the abdomen or pelvis. Separation was deemed too risky, so the twins remained together for their whole lives, but managed to have very distinct existences and were also the only known conjoined twins to identify as different genders. George had spina bifida and was four inches shorter than Lori, who wheeled him about on a specially designed stool.

After spending their first 24 years in an institution for the mentally disabled, the twins lived together in an assisted living facility in Reading, Pennsylvania, where they had separate living spaces and different schedules, showering one at a time. Lori worked for many years in a hospital laundry and was a champion bowler, while George designed support equipment for people with physical disabilities and was a successful country singer. Initially named Dori, George first performed under the name Reba, acknowledging his favorite singer Reba McEntire, but in 2007 he came out as transgender and took the name George. He performed widely in the United States and visited Germany and Japan, and in 1997, he won an LA Music Award for Best New Country Artist. Lori said she paid to attend George's concerts, just like all the other fans, simply making herself quiet and "invisible" while he was performing; in turn, when she went on dates, George would bring along books to read. Lori was engaged for a time, but her fiancé died in a road accident.

The twins made numerous media appearances, including playing conjoined twins Rose and Raven Rosenberg in an episode of the TV medical drama *Nip/Tuck,* and George sang "Fear of Being Alone" over the credits of *Stuck on You*, a comedy about a pair of fictitious conjoined twins. When they died on 7 April at the age of 62, they were the oldest living conjoined twins, following the deaths of Ronnie and Donnie Galyon in 2020, aged 68. It is not yet clear who their successors are.

Lori and George Schappell, conjoined twins; born West Reading, PA, 18 Sept 1961; died, Philadelphia, PA, 7 April 2024, aged 62.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRIES ON THE MARCH

British and Irish folklore are choc-a-bloc with references to fairies appearing as marching soldiers. Take, for instance, this Victorian account from Mellor Moor (Lancashire): "On other occasions the fairies are supposed to exhibit themselves in military array on the mountain sides; their evolutions conforming in every respect to the movements of modern troops. Such appearances are believed to portend the approach of civil commotions, and are said to have been more than usually common about the time of the rebellion in 1745-46."

The idea that what is to happen on Earth, happens first in fairyland is, of course, a common trope. We see it with fairies' funerals anticipating funerals in the human community. Sometimes, though, the fairy armies are uncomfortably close to the human forces they are imitating. Consider the Cornish warband spotted on Castle-an-Dinas, in the 19th century, because "the moonbeams" had been "glancing on their muskets"! As to the fairy war games in Lancashire, maybe these were Stuart militias preparing in secret for Charlie's arrival: Lancashire was, after all, one of the Pretender's few English strongholds.

"SUCH APPEARANCES ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN COMMON ABOUT THE TIME OF THE REBELLION IN 1745-46"

Fairy or pseudo-fairy, I have sometimes wondered whether this conceit of supernatural armies connects to the conviction that a folklore hero will return with phantom warriors to save the day: most famously for modern Britons, Arthur, the once and future king. I recently came across a strangely moving instance of this from the eve of the Great War. A young man (our narrator) is brought by his brother to the door at midnight on the third of August 1914. They lived some five miles outside London and, though neither knew it, war had just been declared on Germany. The brothers heard "clear and distinct, the sound of thousands of footsteps of people shuffling, treading, moving about, but without uttering one single word". This was on the road at the bottom of the hill "about four houses' distance". "Nothing whatever could be seen". How did the brothers interpret this brush with the impossible? They were uncertain, but it "was as if the ghosts of those who were to fall during those coming four years of blood had 'projected' themselves, eerily, at the hour of the declaration of the Great War" upon the road. "Or," the author asked, "were they the spirits of the long-dead soldiers of the centuries, welcoming the heroes of 1914-1918?" The first explanation comes from someone who had been reading too much psychic literature. The second is in line with centuries, probably millennia, of British folklore. It gives the necessary background to the angels – and, more to the point, the archers-of-Mons craze several weeks later.

Simon Young is the editor of *The Wollaton Gnomes: A Nottingham Fairy Mystery.*

Arrivals and abductions

NIGEL WATSON looks at new sources of ufological information and one woman's abduction memoir

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

After much delay Luis Elizondo is bringing out his book, titled *Imminent*. The cover says he was head of AATIP (Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program) and promises the inside story about the Pentagon's hunt for UFOs. Both statements are debatable to say the least, and don't bode well for the rest of the book. We can expect much speculation, 'revelations' and talk of imminent disclosure aimed at UFO believers and those who don't know any better. I have written to Elizondo's publisher saying that the cover is false advertising, but unsurprisingly I've had no reply. I did, however, laugh at seeing the poetic justice of Amazon selling fake copies of *Imminent*. A better choice for an understanding of the subject is the forthcoming new book by Greg Eghigian, professor of history and bioethics at Penn State, titled *After the Flying Saucers Came: A Global History of the UFO Phenomenon*.

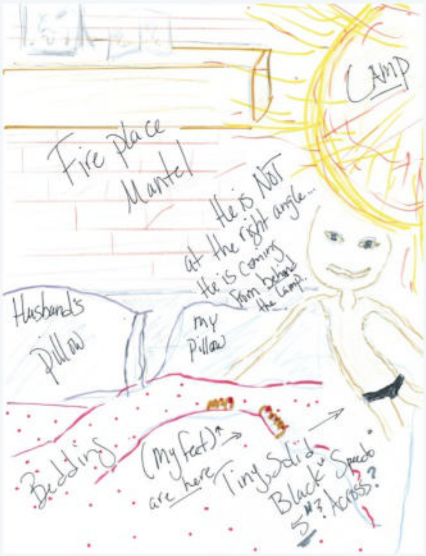
FORTEAN FILES

As forteans, we are always happy to discover new sources of information, and as digital files become increasingly available we are being spoilt for choice. For example, veteran ufologist Grant Cameron has put most of his documents online at: *https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AP3n1G0%2DzV5uM8k&id=1305978EAF66D210%2148635&cid=1305978EAF66D210*

Gretchen Stahlman, an Assistant Professor at the School of Information, Florida State University, has written a paper called "Closing the Information Gap in Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP) Studies". This takes a look at scientific literature on the topic of UFOs/UAPs and how it has evolved as a subject of scholarly inquiry from 1967 to 2023. She found that the majority of studies were in the area of psychology (21%) and religion (13%), and that there was a sharp rise in publications starting in 2021.

She references many intriguing papers, including "On the dynamics of reporting data: A case study of UFO sightings", that studied 80,332 UFO cases reported from 1906 to 2014 to determine behavioural patterns and the influence of media broadcasting. *www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378437122005295*

Stahlman also references a fascinating paper on "Terror in Costa Rica" and how sensational UFO stories were used to distract from civil unrest between 1979 and 1985. *revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/intercambio/article/view/45862*


Fire place Mantel
CAmp
He is NOT at the right angle...
He is coming from behind the Lamp.
Husband's Pillow
my Pillow
Bedding
(my feet) are here
Tiny Solid Black "Speedo" 5"?? Across?

In future she intends to conduct a more extensive study of papers and social media to chart the evolution of UAP discourse. *arxiv.org/pdf/2403.15368*

An equally impressive collection of sources has been put together by Paolo Toselli, whose sixth edition of his international catalogue lists 413 UFO related university dissertations dating from 1948 to 2022. Most of them are in the social sciences, and altogether amount to 73,000 pages of text. The catalogue can be viewed here: *www.cisu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ufotheses_by_paolo_toselli_updated_23122022.pdf*

ALIEN SERVITUDE

It is always worthwhile to read what experiencers say about their encounters. Dana Louise of St Paul, Minnesota, for example, has independently published a book titled *THIS is Gonna Sound Weird: An Awakening Memoir*, about her strange lifelong experiences. She told me:

"'Coming out of the cosmic closet isn't easy,' that's how I put it when asked. I don't expect most people to understand. Once you open your mouth and admit that you've seen an alien... you're doomed. Doomed? Yeah. People's eyes glaze over. You can see them trying to keep a straight face while their brains explode. You can almost hear their thoughts – at least I can. 'Oh wow... she's one of those. What a loony! Her husband must be a saint. She's schizophrenic. What a wild imagination! Aliens? Poor dear was probably raped by a neighbour as a child, and has no clue...' If you're lucky they might confess, 'Me too...' Apparently there are people out there that are faking it – saying they've had an encounter. Like now it's cool? No it isn't. And if they actually were abducted they wouldn't be so eager to say it! There's a bit of hesitation missing in their voice. But that's me. That's where I come from.

LEFT AND BELOW: Dana Louise shares a lifetime's worth of alien encounters in a new book, *THIS is Gonna Sound Weird: An Awakening Memoir*.

COURTESY DANA LOIUSE

"The greys started to visit me while I was still in diapers. Their first visit startled me awake. Awake from then on, on a number of levels. All I could do was lie there until I passed out. This continued on for a good decade. A woman I grew up with recently confirmed those long-ago events. She remembers the humming and the vibrations of those visitations. What a miracle! I believe I was at the end of my servitude to the greys by the age of eight.

"Recently a man (from out of the blue) handed me a (one time) classified file about my dad. This file was another confirmation! It was evidence that I was in a secret programme that swapped alien tech for human contact. I should mention that another neighbour witnessed a microchip that popped out of the back of my neck. Crazy right? Thank God for all of the witnesses! So the answer is NO. I'm not crazy.

"After the greys another species took over, but I had no recollection of them until they stopped by when I was an adult. They took my eggs and my husband's sperm. I apologise if that's a bit much, but how do you think I feel? What have they done with our potential children?!

"So when I confess the things I have endured (this is just the tip of the iceberg,) and I see people's faces wobble, I can only feel bad. Bad that our society has been gaslit! I have seen behind the curtain for all of my life. One day this should be public knowledge, but you can't control people if they know the truth. Right? The clues are all around. Confessions are being told. The truth will set us free!" *danalouise.com*

Wars of the world

JENNY RANDLES on how conflict drives human fears, technological progress and military misdirection

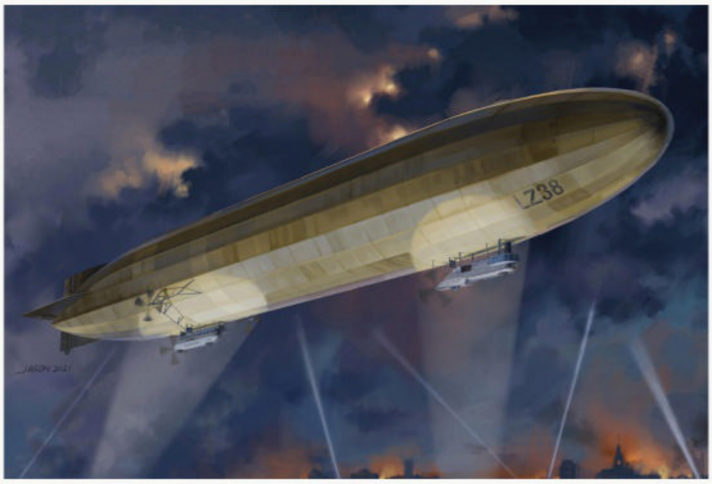
As we find ourselves once again in a world full of conflict, we might wonder whether humanity has a death wish. The West had grown worryingly complacent about the possibility of war, and our recent reality check has made me ponder what link it might have with UFOs. Potentially, the answer is quite a lot.

War creates suspicion of a hidden enemy, and not always the one we ought to fear the most, especially in a world where small groups – rather than hostile empires – could purloin a terrifying weapon and hold a city to ransom. The nature of the threat changes, but little else does.

What has this got to do with UFOs you might ask. Well, I have noticed that in times of stress for humanity – and war is perhaps the greatest source of all sources of stress – we find that strange things seen in the sky seem to proliferate. Are they a product of human fears? Perhaps, as war or the fear of war has a habit of provoking nightmares. But war is also a catalyst for speeding up technological advances. And if new technology has to be tested, sometimes in ways that might be more visible than usual, then these strange aerial phenomena might not be dark omens of defeat, but part of the fightback.

We saw in World War I how a new technology – blimps, balloons and airships – actually became part of the frontline conflict and when observed by unaware citizens were perceived in many respects as the ‘alien invaders’ of the day.

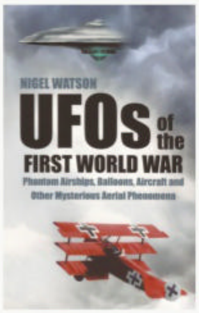
Indeed, even before World War I Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, was concerned about the wave of floating ‘ships in the sky’ being reported by British citizens. On 14 October 1912 such a ‘ship’ was witnessed over the Sheerness Naval Yard in Kent, which would certainly be a strategic target for attack. Churchill took this seriously, probably because he knew these airships had the genuine potential to be more than just spy craft seeking out possible targets. The real fear was that they were capable of causing death and destruction from the sky via the use of explosives. This might be why four decades later the now elderly Churchill, as Prime Minister, was still alert enough to take seriously the early 1950s sightings of ‘flying saucers’: he was the first major political figure to order an investigation into what appeared to be new technology of unknown origin, asking the Air Ministry to look into the subject (see **FT372:32-39**).



In World War I, it turned out that the airships were mostly real, not fear-induced illusions

Back in WWI, though, it turned out that the airships were mostly real, not fear-induced illusions; but while they did become a bombing threat for a short time they were soon overtaken by fast-developing aircraft technology.

What this tells us is that, firstly, for over a century there have been ‘strange’ things in the sky; and, secondly, that not only civilians but leading figures in politics and defence were aware of the real dangers they might pose. UFOs are not in any sense, then, a recent concept: what was new was the way we attributed an extraterrestrial origin to them derived from science fiction and popular culture. Prior to that, more down-to-Earth identifications were put forward: our enemies were likely to hail from other countries, not other planets.


NIGEL WATSON
UFOs of the FIRST WORLD WAR
Phantom Airships, Balloons, Aircraft and Other Mysterious Aerial Phenomena

But perhaps it was sometimes advantageous to encourage the idea that the strange craft people reported seeing really were *not* of this Earth. What a perfect feat of misdirection – a favoured tactic in any conflict, as the recent D-Day commemorations reminded us (see **FT185:38-45**) for a full account of the D-Day deception campaign).

I think this should offer pause for thought concerning our assumptions about these things up in the sky. The renewed interest in a 34-year-old case from 1990 in Calvine, Scotland, which FT regular Dr David Clarke has been investigating for many years (see pp.4-5), resulted in a double page spread in the *Daily Mail* in June, offering new insight into what looks remarkably like a real UFO-like object that was, by chance, captured in a photograph.

The case has long been shrouded in mystery and controversy, but was it just a hoax? Or does it point to yet more misdirection as to the true origin of at least some of the many UFO sightings on record? Is new tech occasionally observed in our skies and inevitably misperceived as UFO activity? And is this misperception then encouraged by the authorities as a useful distraction? The idea of alien invaders can be an effective way to wrong-foot a real enemy, making it harder for them to know exactly what cutting-edge tech might be at an experimental stage or flying on test. And if you need to test something, then if it looks more like popular perceptions of an alien UFO than an aircraft from a secret airbase, then that’s just an added bonus.

Obviously whatever it was, it will now be old hat as technology from a third of a century later. But could more UFO cases globally be the result of Earthly technology? Perhaps designing them to look like spaceships, in line with how the UFO mystery has developed over the last half century, provides a ready-made invisibility cloak, ensuring that accidental sightings of secret tech are filed as ‘just one of those crazy flying saucer reports’.

For more on phantom airships and related phenomena, see Nigel Watson, *UFOs of the First World War* (The History Press, 2015).

DEMONS VAMPIRES & SEA MONSTERS

THE WILD LIFE OF AN ANGLICAN EXORCIST

REVEREND PETER LAWS tells the story of globe-trotting Anglican vicar Dr Donald Omand, whose fight against the powers of darkness saw him tussling with hellhounds and vampires and exorcising everything from the Loch Ness Monster to the Bermuda Triangle.

The *Daily Sport* ran an article about me once. They sent me a mock-up before it went to press, and I had two notes of crucial feedback. Firstly, the headline read: "Possessed by Demons… we all have a fear of that happening to us". I don't know *anybody* whose biggest worry is being 'possessed', so I suggested changing it. Yet it was the other part that really got my goat: "Exclusive interview with one of the UK's Leading Exorcists." Yes, I was ordained as a Church Minister, but I'm not an exorcist – never mind a leading one. I'd once delivered a talk on exorcism at the London premiere of a horror film called *The Vatican Tapes*, and that was enough for them to assume I was a real-life demon hunter.

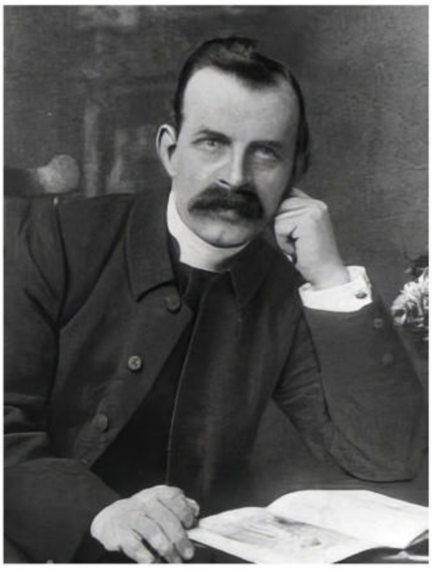
And even if I *had* been an exorcist, I couldn't compete with the man you'll meet in this article. A Scottish vicar with a soft voice and piercing blue eyes whose career included some of the craziest, most spectacular exorcisms you'll ever come across…

THE SIGHT

Donald Omand was born in Perth, Scotland, in 1903, and his interest in the supernatural came from his family. His father (Donald Elder Omand according to the 1911 Census) was a Presbyterian Church minister from Edinburgh, though his family originated in Orkney, a group of more than 70 islands, only 20 of which are inhabited. This mysterious, brooding area of Scotland is home to a tangled web of Norse, Scottish and Celtic folklore. Donald loved to hear those stories growing up, usually from his grandfather, who was also a Presbyterian minister, though a stern and bigoted one.

Yet it was Donald's mother who really set the course for his paranormal life. Margaret Omand hailed from the West Highlands and had a form of psychic awareness that Donald called "the sight", which manifested as vivid preternatural *pictures* in her mind. Donald believed that in the past all human beings had the sight, but civilisation had gradually caused this 'feyness' to dwindle and disappear. A few outliers still possessed it. His mother was one of them.

Donald witnessed this first-hand in 1914 after the family had moved to



ABOVE LEFT: Donald's father, the Presbyterian Church minister Donald Elder Omand. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The vicarage at Chidecock, Dorset, where Donald was vicar.

Darlington in the North East of England. A woman called Mrs Scott came to visit, and the two women were happily chatting about general topics until Donald's mother was suddenly gripped by a weird hysteria. She shouted, "Ray is coming down in flames; he's in flames!" before falling to the floor in a faint. Mrs Scott watched in dread; at the time, her son Ray was serving in the Royal Flying Corps. Later, she got word that Ray had indeed been shot down… on the very day of Mrs Omand's outburst.

The 'sight' struck again, this time after Donald almost drowned. He was swimming in a lake with his elder brother John and underestimated the depth. Gasping for breath and losing strength, John managed to drag his little brother onto the riverbank and press the water out of his lungs. Thankfully, the boy was unharmed, but John was terrified their father would ban them from lake swimming. He instructed Donald to keep the accident a secret. When they arrived home, their father wasn't there. He'd already left in a panic to find them. Earlier, Donald's mother had drained of colour and started screaming, "My lad is drowning!"

Incidents like this convinced Donald that he was related to a woman with a genuine supernatural gift.

HITLER AND OTHER MONSTERS

As Donald matured into adulthood, he felt a growing sense of calling. He would follow his father and grandfather into Church ministry. His father wasn't keen and thought the lad needed a taste of real life first. Being ordained myself, I've known countless ministerial candidates who are told the same thing: "If you've grown up in Church, you need to get a normal job first… get a feel for the *real* world."

So Donald found a job in Darlington. He worked as a journalist for the *Northern Echo* newspaper, which led to a foreign correspondent role for a London news agency. It took him to the Continent, which would begin a trend in his life – the ability to wander into the remarkable. In Germany, he bagged an interview with Adolf Hitler, not just once, but three times.

HE HEARD HIMSELF SAYING THE WORDS "GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!"

When Donald later became an exorcist, he was asked if he could sense 'evil' in the Führer in those early days. "Funnily enough, no," he said. "I felt I was in the presence of someone who needed help. He was dreadfully unhappy and dreadfully lonely… he seemed strangely empty, almost as though part of his personality was missing."

All this changed when Donald attended the Nuremberg rallies and was struck by a stark change in Hitler's persona. The private emptiness had been filled with another, more forceful character entirely. It was as if "he was occupied by something much more powerful than himself. Certainly, it wasn't the pathetic creature I had interviewed."

As Donald listened to the fiery rhetoric from a man destined to become a byword for evil, he believed he was witnessing a human being taken over by an external, malevolent invader. You might almost say, *possessed*.

Donald wondered if he might have inherited his mother's supernatural gifts, but it was only later when he went to college that he became fully aware of this inherited power. The revelation came when a fellow student came to Donald, desperately upset, and confided that one of the college professors was sexually abusing him. This teacher had a reputation on campus for being what Donald described as "a pervert".

Donald encouraged his friend to resist the predator, but the boy was doubtful whether that was even possible. Then, one day, he happened to walk into a study where he stumbled across the abusive professor leering over his friend. He immediately felt a tense sadness in the air and knew instantly what must be happening. Furious at the interruption, the professor glared at Donald and viciously snapped "Go away!"

There are moments in our lives that define us. This was Donald's.

The glaring professor was a fearsome figure, so to stand up to him was no easy task. Donald would later say he didn't fully know what came over him. He just opened his mouth and heard himself saying the words "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

To say such a thing to a feared and respected member of the faculty was the very epitome of insult and insubordination. Yet, the response was remarkable. "To my amazement," Donald said, "this man just seemed to crumple up. He slunk out of the study and showed no more interest in corrupting my friend."

Donald couldn't get this incident out of his head. Not only had he sensed evil in the study that day, but his words had somehow demonstrated authority over it. He knew that in the New Testament Jesus had given the disciples the power of exorcism. Might he too have been granted such a gift?

He decided not to rush into anything. He would read into the subject extensively while he gained his doctorate in comparative religion and religious philosophy. That study would lead him to lecture on the topic in Berlin, which is when he received confirmation of his true calling as an exorcist. The revelation came from a totally unexpected source…

IN THE LIONS' DEN

While lecturing in religious philosophy, Donald was hired by the prestigious German film studio, UFA; they had made Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Murnau's *Faust*, and now they took on Donald as a consultant for a Biblical epic. Yet, when he turned up at the studio, the lot was full of circus folk gathered to make a

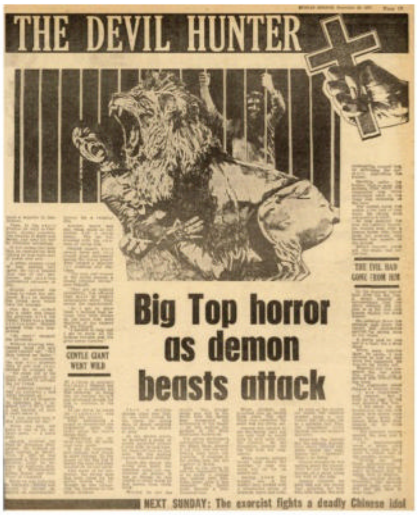
ABOVE: Donald's relationship with circus folk would continue throughout his career; here he performs a Christening for a big top baby in 1960. **BELOW:** The terrifying story of Donald's first exorcism in a German circus, as retold by the *Sunday Mirror* in 1977.

film. When they saw Donald's clerical collar, they were thrilled. Life on the road meant no solid connections with local churches, yet they badly needed a vicar for weddings, baptisms, and the annual blessings for circus animals.[1] He sympathised with their plight. While lecturing in southern Germany, he learned of a circus visiting the town and was eager to help them with their religious needs. As he wandered among caravans and tents, he expected the usual requests for christenings or blessings… until someone came to him with a tale that would lead to Donald performing his first exorcism.

There was a problem with one of the performers. The strongman had always been a kind and gentle soul; until recently, when his personality had changed. It had started when the circus visited a small town and the man, being very religious, had visited the local church to pray. When he stepped into the porch, he saw a group of people gathered around a strange man with the "most evil face" the strongman had ever seen". Frightened by the malevolent glare, the strongman rushed into the church to kneel and pray. Yet, for the first time in his life, he couldn't find the words. He hurried to leave, but saw that the strange man had started laughing and – to the strongman's horror – was making the motions of the Holy Eucharist… but backwards! The terrified strongman was convinced he had stumbled into a 'black mass'.

Back at the circus, he confided in the ringmaster. Yet as he told his story, his face began to change. As the night wore on, the other performers began to worry. The normally gentle strongman was marching around the circus grounds, shouting, swearing and kicking children. They begged the visiting padre to speak to him, and Donald and the ringmaster headed to the circus tent to wait for the interval. The trapeze artists were just finishing, and next would be the animal act. A cage was erected, into which padded leopards, tigers and lions, all to the amazed delight of the small-town crowd.

The lion-tamer began his usual performance until a figure approached the cage and grabbed the bars with both hands. It was the strongman, who kept on shaking the bars, staring at the beasts inside. Three of the crew stepped up to remove him, but before they reached him, he fainted and slid to the sawdust floor. At that exact moment, the two lions leapt from the pedestal where they had been sitting and rushed at the trainer, clawing and biting at his body. The horrified crowd screamed. Donald was in shock too, but not so much that he didn't notice something odd. The other animals in the tent did not join in the attack. They sat quietly, as the lion and lioness tore the trainer to bloody ribbons. The ringmaster was convinced that the evil in the church had been transmitted to the strongman, who had now passed it to the lions – just as the demons of Legion had entered the pigs in the New Testament. He begged Donald to get in the cage and cast the demons out.



THE DEVIL HUNTER

Big Top horror as demon beasts attack

GENTLE GIANT WENT WILD

THE EVIL HAD GONE FROM HIM

NEXT SUNDAY: The exorcist fights a deadly Chinese idol

THE STRONGMAN WAS CONVINCED HE HAD STUMBLED INTO A 'BLACK MASS'

Donald was frightened, but he'd been studying exorcism and knew the ritual and prayers. Granted, he hadn't expected to be trying them out in such a lethal scenario, but nobody else could help. By now, the audience had been herded out of the tent and attendants had managed to drag the trainer's ruined body from the cage. The strongman was carried back to his trailer, where a doctor pronounced he had not fainted, but was in a deep sleep.

Sweating with fear, Donald was guided to the cage as the two lions leapt back up on their pedestals. They watched him approach. I'm not sure why he couldn't have performed the exorcism *through* the bars, but the assistant trainer opened the cage door and Donald walked inside on trembling legs. Yet as soon as he entered, the fear vanished, and he was filled with a sense of peace. He raised his hand and recited the exorcism prayers, first in Latin, then in English. Eventually, the snarling beasts seemed to settle. Then, they leapt down from their plinths and padded softly and placidly into the caged tunnel. It was over.

Donald had performed his first exorcism, not on a person but a deadly jungle cat. The story was so wild that it spread: when Donald began a lecture tour of the USA, the halls were heaving with people wanting to meet 'the circus exorcist'.

BLACK DOG

By the early 1950s, Donald and his wife had moved back to England. He had been ordained as a Free Church Minister in 1937 and was serving as the minister of Beaconsfield Free Methodist Church; soon, he would join the Anglican Church and work as a par-

BERND BRUEGGEMANN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The beach at Kettleness, near Whitby, a landscape with an atmosphere of dread and an "aroma of corruption" that haunted Donald's imagination for years.

ish priest from 1954 until 1971,[2] but the forces of darkness would continue to summon him.

When he was a boy, Donald and his family had holidayed in Sandsend, near Whitby. During that trip, they visited a bare and desolate beach three miles up the coast called Kettleness. When the young Donald strolled along the shore, he felt himself recoil. He had the distinct impression that this stretch of sand was *teeming* with demonic entities. Why? He had no idea. The spot just felt "laden with corruption".

A few years later, a relative handed him a novel. It was Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The then 14-year-old Donald was gripped, but that same shiver came back when he saw that Stoker mentioned Kettleness by name five times. What's more, Dracula had appeared as a black dog, and Donald learned that Kettleness had a legend of a great spectral hound. By the time he closed Stoker's book, he was a massive fan of the novel; but its themes and locations haunted him.

So, imagine his feelings when, in the early 1950s, he received a letter from a greatly distressed schoolmaster. The man had been on holiday with two friends when all three had seen a vast and spectral black hound appear, "So large, it could not be normal." The men had encountered this evil presence near Whitby, the letter said, on a beach called Kettleness... That same decades-old dread returned, and, fearing for the schoolmaster, Donald replied immediately with a telegram. He was ready to help.

He hopped straight on a train from Kings Cross to Scarborough Station, where the schoolmaster was waiting. The two men travelled by car to Sandsend, where Donald booked into a small hotel. Then, with a bottle of Holy Water in hand, the vicar and the teacher drove the coastal roads to the beach whose dark atmosphere had struck both Donald and Bram Stoker before him as so powerful.

Now in his fifties, Donald once more set eyes on the rocky shore surrounded by looming, fossilised cliffs. It looked a little different, but one thing remained identical – "the aroma of corruption". It was night when the two men arrived. Donald was about to make a Dracula joke to lighten the mood when the schoolmaster grabbed his arm. Donald followed his gaze, and there it was, brooding on the shore: an enormous black hound. This, Donald would later say, was not a physical cryptid, but a spectral creature visible only to those who had 'the sight'. The schoolmaster clearly had the same gift, because he screamed and ran. Donald stood his ground, even as the manifestation pounded across the sand toward him. He popped the cork of his holy water and commanded the demon to leave in the name of Christ. When the water hit the apparition, it vanished. Not only that, but the entire beach instantly lost its atmosphere of dread.

Donald hurried back to the car – and was shocked to see the schoolmaster had gone out of his mind with fright. The man would never truly recover from his ordeal. After he returned to the Midlands, he had a complete nervous breakdown and was eventually admitted to a mental hospital. He died there, in his early sixties. Perhaps Donald thought this was as close as he'd ever come to a real-life Dracula experience. If he did, he was wrong.

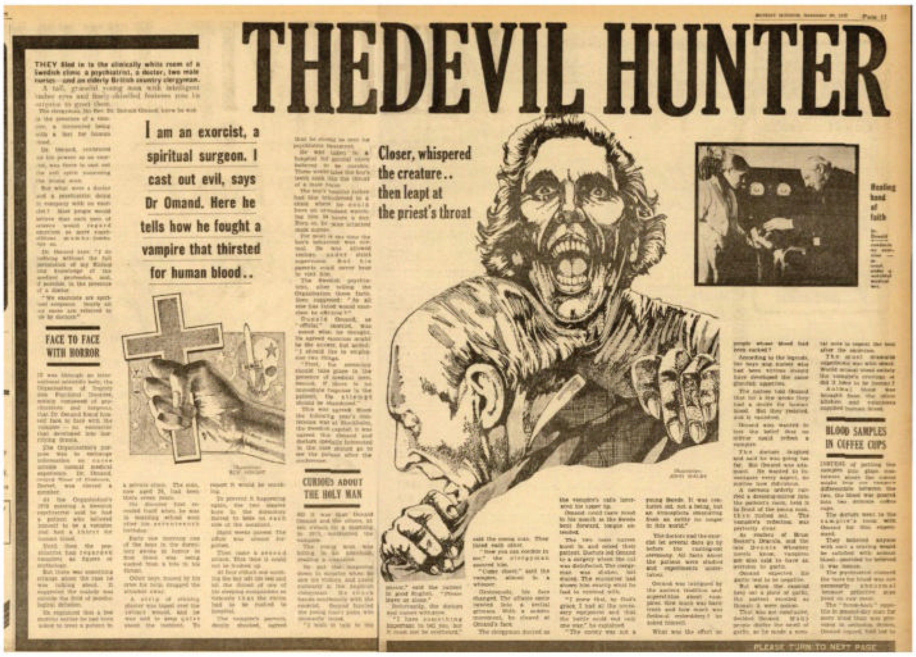
HE WAS A TEENAGE VAMPIRE

When Donald embarked on his American lecture tour early in his exorcism career, he was approached by two medical men in Chicago. They introduced themselves as members of the OIPD (Organisation of Enquiry into Psychical Disorder), which had been founded in Vienna the previous year.[3] The group investigated cases where irrational human behaviour could not be explained by standard psychiatry. Intrigued by the concept of exorcism, they invited Donald to join their society. He did – and some of his wildest cases were to come from this connection.

It was at one of their meetings that he met a Swedish psychiatrist with a truly shocking claim. He had a 24-year-old patient in a private clinic who believed he was a vampire and genuinely thirsted for blood. The condition had come to light seven years earlier when the then 17-year-old was at boarding school. One night, he had crept into the dormitory, crawled up to one of the sleeping boys, clamped his teeth into the child's throat and sucked as hard as he could. Naturally, the boy woke up screaming, rousing the others, who could barely believe what they were seeing. In a gang, they dragged the vampire off.

The boys kept the incident from teachers, but eight weeks later the teenage vampire struck again, biting so hard that he tore a deep and ragged gash in a fellow pupil's throat. This time, the wound was so serious that it was impossible to cover it up. The horrified staff rushed the victim to hospital and the boy responsible was committed to a psychiatric clinic. Three weeks later, he tried to bite the neck of a male nurse. The boy's wealthy parents had him transferred to an isolated private hospital in Scandinavia where they hoped their money might fund some kind of cure. His attacks on male staff continued, the boy drawing blood with his teeth on two further occasions.

As the psychiatrist presented this dramatic case to Donald and the OIPD, he admitted he



THEDEVIL HUNTER

THEY filed in to the clinically white room of a Swedish clinic: a psychiatrist, a doctor, two male nurses – and an elderly British country clergyman.

I am an exorcist, a spiritual surgeon. I cast out evil, says Dr Omand. Here he tells how he fought a vampire that thirsted for human blood..

Closer, whispered the creature.. then leapt at the priest's throat

FACE TO FACE WITH HORROR

CURIOUS ABOUT THE HOLY MAN

Healing hand of faith

BLOOD SAMPLES IN COFFEE CUPS

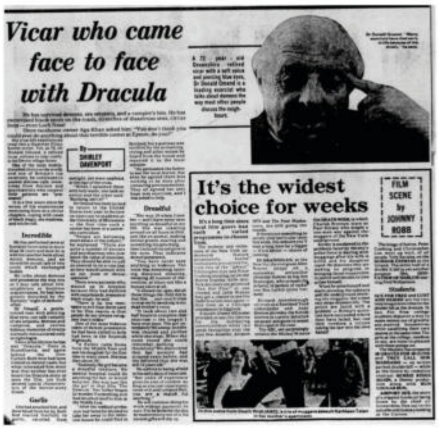
PLEASE TURN TO NEXT PAGE

was sceptical of the concept of vampirism, but had noticed a worrying detail: the staff the boy had bitten were experiencing a growing and morbid fascination with blood. Donald argued that this case was beyond psychology – the boy required an exorcism. It was agreed to send him to Scandinavia.

He arrived at the clinic at nightfall, along with two doctors from the OIPD. The following day, at 10am, Donald was taken to meet the 'vampire', escorted by the psychiatrist, a second doctor and two male nurses. They found the patient relaxing in an armchair, idly flicking through a German magazine. Seeing his visitors, the man set the magazine down and stood to greet them. He seemed courteous and friendly, though Donald noted his palm was unusually clammy. The patient asked to spend some time alone with Donald, but the staff refused at first. Donald convinced them to give them some space, but to leave the door ajar. The vampire calmly asked Donald to come closer so he might whisper something into his ear… Before the priest knew it, he felt sharp fingernails raking across his face, tearing through his lip and leaving his mouth drenched in blood. Seeing it, the patient sprang forward, his tongue lolling toward Donald's chin. Donald noticed the vampire gave off a hideous stench.

The patient never reached him because the two male nurses burst in and dragged him away. Donald was hurried to the infirmary, where he had his lip attended to, but rather than being shaken, the vicar was "elated". The smell that hit him was the same "aroma of corruption" he'd experienced at Kettleness! This was the proof he needed that the issue was demonic – which meant he could fix it.

DONALD AND THE DOCTORS DEVISED A SERIES OF BIZARRE 'VAMPIRE TESTS'



Vicar who came face to face with Dracula

By SHIRLEY DAVENPORT

It's the widest choice for weeks

FILM SCENE by JOHNNY ROBB

LEFT AND BELOW: Donald's teenage vampire encounter in the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Belfast News*. **FACING PAGE:** Donald is filmed while performing an exorcism on the A35 in Dorset in 1971.

They didn't rush into an exorcism. Instead, Donald and the doctors devised a series of bizarre 'vampire tests'. For example, they put a mirror in front of the young man to see if he had a reflection. Some of the other staff laughed at that, especially when he did, of course, produce a reflection. He was also unfazed by holy water, rubbing it on his face and saying, "This is very soothing." Donald even brought in animal blood from the kitchens and human blood provided by four volunteers. He served it in coffee cups as a blind 'taste test'. The young man seemed excited when Donald brought in a cup of blood, but when he lifted it to his lips, he paused. A long moment passed before he walked to the sink and poured it away. A second cup was offered, and this time the man seized it, guzzling the contents before an appalled audience. The rejected cup was animal blood; the second cup was human.

When the tests were complete, Donald was convinced that an exorcism was required, to take place with three witnesses. He placed blessed salt and water on a table in the centre of the room. As the ritual began, the patient didn't react. He just watched this strange Scottish priest reciting prayers and readings. Yet some time into the ritual, Donald said the words, "Strike terror, O Lord, into the wild beast rooting up thy vine." The 'vampire', quiet up until this point, suddenly lunged at Donald with a bestial ferocity. He didn't want to drink Donald's blood anymore – he wanted to murder him. The nurses restrained him in a chair; after medication was given, Donald completed the ritual.

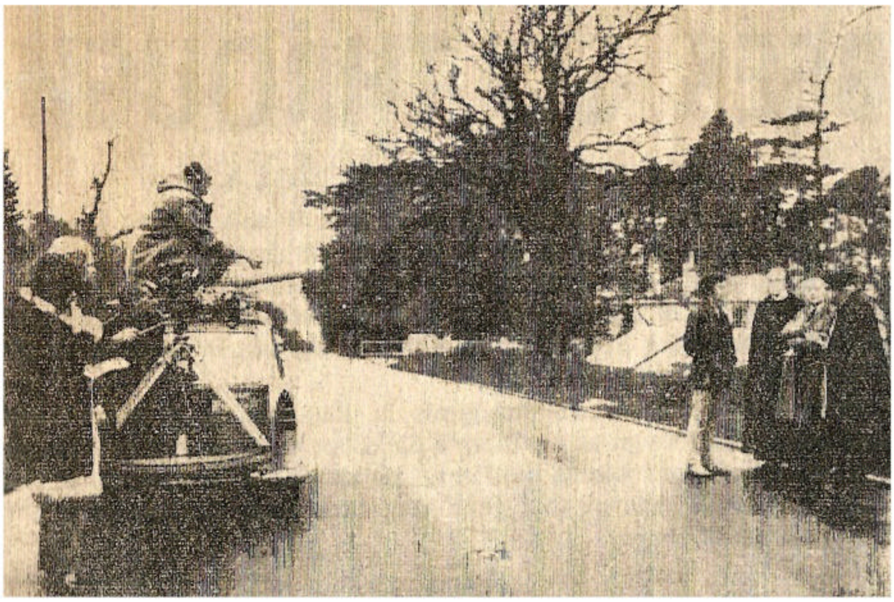
Whether this was a psychological placebo or a genuine spiritual breakthrough is up to you to decide, but the patient seemed cured after that. He was eventually allowed to leave, and moved to an isolated part of Norway with his parents. Three months later, the clinic reported all was well.

Donald was called in on other cases of vampirism, including a patient who later discovered that he was a direct descendant of Countess Elizabeth Bathory, the notorious royal who allegedly drank and bathed in human blood (**FT223:38-43**). Donald probed this case a little deeper and discovered a spine-tingling connection. The parents of this young 'vampire' had toured England by car a few months after they were married. They had enjoyed their time in England, other than on one stretch of coastline, which left them both feeling oppressed. Donald probed them on the name. "Oh," they said, "they called that place Kettleness."

All these incidents of vampirism and phantom hounds got Donald thinking. He knew that people could become possessed… but what about *places*? Kettleness had, for him, been occupied by an evil force with the power to influence, corrupt and even control others. He began to wonder if his exorcist calling was broader than he'd originally imagined.

HIGHWAYS TO HELL

Mention an exorcism and most people picture a priest casting a demon out from a possessed person. Donald certainly did plenty of those, like the case of a father who returned from the Middle East to a shocking reaction from his 14-year-old daughter. The normally placid teen was screaming, wailing and crawling around "like that girl in *The Exorcist*" (according to the *Belfast News*). Donald thought it was obvious: she had been possessed by a demon brought back from the father's trip. When Donald met her, she was 18 and living with her weary parents in a remote house in Scotland. They had hidden her from the locals, who barely even knew she existed until the postman heard terrifying sobs and screams coming from the house. When Donald was



called in, he found her crawling on all fours "just like an animal", grunting, snarling and covered in her own excrement. You'd think social services might have been summoned, but Donald said he saw the girl's eyes glowing red – so an exorcism began. Two and a half hours later, the daughter came to as if waking from a dream. She was her old self again, and assumed she was still 14 – until she looked in the mirror and saw an adult staring back, her face ravaged by the suffering of four long years she had no memory of.

Yet only a third of Donald's exorcisms involved people. The rest were connected to places, like Kettleness, that he believed had an evil power. Accident black spots were a key area of concern, and he would zero in on specific strips of road where repeated car crashes occurred.

Donald first considered the idea of demonically engineered accidents when he met an Austrian Hospital Consultant. The doctor claimed their casualty ward had seen a sudden upturn in road accidents. The disturbing part was that the motorists said they'd felt *compelled* to crash their cars. With the help of a surgeon, physician and police chief, Donald interviewed 1,000 accident victims and heard many frightening stories about why they had crashed. They had usually been driving along quite happily until they reached a specific stretch of road where they were suddenly overcome with the insane yet impossible-to-resist urge to jerk the steering wheel and slam the car into oncoming traffic.

One car crash victim said that he was driving along a country lane when he saw a sports car heading toward him on the other side of the road. He felt an impulse to plough into the other vehicle, but he was a devout Catholic. He prayed that this dangerous influence would leave him; and it did almost immediately. However, to his horror, he saw the oncoming sports car suddenly mirror what he had almost done himself. It swerved sharply across the road, and the two cars smashed into one another head-on. Whatever haunted that road, it would seem, was determined to wreak destruction by any means.

Donald visited hundreds of black spots to carry out exorcisms, and the BBC made a documentary about his road exorcisms, including one ritual he carried out between Charmouth and Morcombelake in Dorset (**FT328:19, 440:31**). Marc Alexander's biography of Donald claimed there had been 17 accidents in the six months before the exorcism… and none in the following six months. Impressed with the 'Donald effect', racehorse owner Aga Khan once asked him, "You don't think you could ever do anything about that terrible corner at Epsom, do you?"

However, some of his claims have been questioned. I found a newspaper article about a so-called cursed stretch of the A30 at the Iron Bridge, near Honiton in Devon. Sister Daphne Reeves of Honiton Hospital had claimed that the road had seen seven fatal crashes in the year before the exorcism and none after. The article argued that there had been only one death before the exorcism and three serious accidents following it![4]

LAKE MONSTERS

In September 1967, Donald was taking a break from casting out demons. He was caravanning on the shores of Loch Long in Ross-shire. While strolling along the water's edge, he noticed the surface of the Loch become suddenly disturbed. Amazed, he saw two humps emerge from the foam!

Not content with one sea monster sighting, he had another in June 1968. This time, he was in the company of Captain Jan Andersen, who had taken him out to a mysterious waterway in Norway known as the Trollfjord. As the boat moved across the lake, both men witnessed two humps slide up into view. Donald was scared, yet the captain was surprisingly relaxed. He admitted that he had seen this before, assuring Donald that "It won't hurt us. They never do."

Sure enough, the creature veered off to the starboard side, and they watched it sink and vanish. Donald wanted to follow it, yet the captain refused. When quizzed as to why, his answer was confusing. The creature, he said, was *evil*. Donald frowned at this. Why would a cryptid be classed as evil? This was surely just a previously undiscovered natural marvel. Yet the captain's theory evoked memories of the great black hound on Kettleness beach. Andersen doubted it was a physical creature at all; instead, it was a manifestation of something akin to the serpent tempter from the book of Genesis.

This theory gained more traction in 1972 when Donald attended that year's OIPD conference. A Scandinavian neurologist shared his concerns about the sightings of a legendary creature on Lake Storsjon. He wasn't so much bothered about whether the beast existed or not, but was more concerned with the effect sightings had on the witnesses. He said their lives started to fall apart soon after seeing the creature. He asked Donald if an exorcism might be required. This prompted much debate, of course. How would one exorcise an enormous body of water, with a large unknown creature in it?

They decided that Donald should attempt it – yet rather than ship him to Scandinavia just yet, they suggested he try it out on a beastie closer to home. Which is why Donald Omand headed north to carry out an exorcism of Loch Ness (see **FT391:55**). Donald believed Nessie might be the spectre of an ancient dragon, a theory explored in FW Holiday's 1973 book *The Dragon and the Disc.* He also speculated that Nessie's malign spiritual influence had sparked a wave of drinking, drugs, broken marriages and even black magic in the locals. Aleister Crowley did make his home by the Loch in Boleskine House; did the notorious occultist choose the location for the views, or was the Great Beast summoned there by an inherently evil, spectral creature?

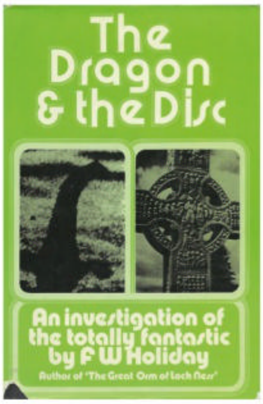
Loch Ness covers an area of 56.4 km^2 (22 square miles) with a depth of 230m (755ft). Casting a demon out of such a vast body would be no mean feat. To plan the ritual, Donald brought in a Benedictine monk from Buckinghamshire called Dom Robert Petitpierre (see **FT440:32**). The two men pored over a large-scale map of the loch and came up with a novel approach. They charted a crucifix shape across the water. The plan was to carry out an exorcism at the four external points of the cross (located on the shore), followed by one final exorcism from a boat, bobbing on the surface where the cross beams intersected.

So in June 1973, the 71-year-old Donald arrived in Drumnadrochit, close by Loch Ness. With him was a photographer called Steve Roberts and there to greet them was a group including Wing Commander Basil Cary and his wife Winifred and author FW Holiday. The party of five were blessed with holy water, then they set off in two cars to begin

ABOVE: Donald restages his exorcism of Loch Ness for the BBC cameras in 1973. **BELOW:** FW Holiday's book influenced Donald's conception of Nessie as an evil spirit.

the multi-site ritual. The BBC later covered the event for their *Nationwide* programme, recreating the journey and the rituals for the cameras. Holiday wrote an account of the day and remarked on the sense of tension that grew the closer they got to the final rite on the water.

When the rituals were finally complete, Donald almost collapsed. He had to be physically carried back to his caravan afterwards. This personal energy drain was proof to him that the exorcism had worked, though he was eager to point out that he had only removed the *evil* from Nessie. The beast might still be spotted in the years to come – but it would no longer leave moral corruption in its wake. The BBC put Donald's theory to the locals, including a man who was interviewed standing at his garden gate. The presenter asked him if he believed Nessie was an evil spirit that drove all the locals to drink. The man burst out laughing and said, "We don't need a monster to do that!"



The Dragon & the Disc

An investigation of the totally fantastic by F W Holiday

Author of 'The Great Orm of Loch Ness'

The Loch Ness purging was deemed a success, and so Donald went on to exorcise Lake Storsjon in Sweden – the case that had prompted it all. It was a much bigger lake than Loch Ness, but after the ritual, Donald was confident of success. Afterwards, he liaised with the physician who first brought the case to the OIPD. The doctor had been tracking incidents of suicide, mental illness, and marital breakdown and claimed that these had all dramatically decreased after the exorcism. However, Donald was not content with even this vast body of water. Toward the end of his life, he went even bigger… with his most ambitious exorcism yet.

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

In 1978, Donald decided to exorcise one of the most notorious paranormal hot-spots of the day: the Bermuda Triangle (see **FT143:6, 145:66, 181:24**). Most theories about what caused the supposed disappearances within the Triangle focused on UFOs, portals, sea monsters, time funnels and, of course, natural phenomena. Donald had a different take.

It came to him during an American lecture tour in the early 1950s. While in Miami, he was invited on a boat trip by a sailor called Nick Sinclair. The *Dainty Dinah* set out in perfect weather, yet once the land had vanished from view, a fierce storm kicked in; as it battered the boat, Nick tried to reassure Donald that such sudden weather changes were not unusual at the edge of the Bermuda Triangle. This was the first time Donald had ever heard the phrase, and he knew nothing of the mysteries reported there. Yet above the wind and quaking waves, the priest was sure he could hear something else: the sound of hundreds of voices crying out in lamentation. His second sight immediately told him these were the voices of the dead slaves abducted from Africa and brought to the colonies of America. Some of them had been thrown overboard and perished in these very waters.

Back on land, Donald learned more of the Triangle and wondered if the phenomena there were somehow linked to the still echoing sins of the slave trade. He discussed his theory with various people, including Martin Luther King, who Donald claimed agreed that the enslaved dead might somehow haunt that stretch of water. He researched the Triangle and found that others had heard this strange moaning, too. Perhaps exorcising these waters could give the poor souls peace.

Donald, along with an English medical doctor called Terry Glanvill, returned to the Triangle in January 1978. Together, they hopped on mopeds and searched Bermuda for the right place to perform the ritual. They found it in Horseshoe Bay. The plan was to exorcise the three points of the Triangle in Bermuda, Miami and Puerto Rico while arranging for special prayer services to take place in Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia, as well as Bristol and Liverpool where some of the slave traders had their home ports. The ritual at Horseshoe Bay took two hours, and concluded with Donald wading into the waters in his clerical robes to complete the rite.

Twelve days later, on 28 January, one of the most striking incidents to ever happen in the Triangle took place. A Boeing 727 from Miami to Newark lost power in all three engines. The crew were baffled, but didn't have long to theorise as the plane dropped out of the air, plunging 7,000ft (2,134m). They seemed destined to become another victim of 'The Devil's Triangle'. Then, the engines suddenly roared back into life. The amazed pilots were able to avoid the sea and reach a safe altitude once more. Did Donald's exorcism, 12 days earlier, end the Bermuda Triangle curse? He and his biographer certainly thought so.

A CALLING

It would take a whole book to cover all the darmatic events in the life of Donald Omand, so if you want to hear of his tangles with cursed Chinese idols and more, you'll have to look elsewhere. No wonder the *Belfast News* in 1975 called him "One of the most widely travelled clerics in the world and one of Britain's top exorcists." Donald's mission was to see medical science and the Church working together to alleviate human suffering. He told

LEFT: Donald returned to the lions' den in 1970 in this story in the *Daily Mirror*; he seems to be reprising his very first exorcism (and perhaps his memories of Hitler). **BELOW:** Donald speaks to a reporter for the BBC's *Nationwide* in 1973.

the paper that doctors "should be able to call an exorcist in on a case just as they would consult with an ear, nose and throat specialist." He was still blessing circuses in his late 60s, with a *Daily Mirror* article from 1970 picturing him inside a lion's cage "where one false step could prove fatal when the smallest hint of fear could end in a savage mauling".

Cynics might suspect some sort of cash grab, but Donald never took any payment for work beyond his parish duties. He told a newspaper that the day he made money out of it, "his natural gifts would dry up". Marc Alexander's biography, complete with a personal commendation from the then Bishop of Hertford, showcases an earnest man eager to do good and thoroughly convinced of the supernatural. Colin Wilson wrote the foreword and shared Donald's belief in the paranormal, even though he disagreed with the Christian lens through which it was presented.

It should be said that the various books and articles on Donald Omand do seem to omit some less flattering details. For example, I uncovered a *Daily Mirror* news report from 22 June 1965 in which he was barred from three pubs in his home village because of drunkenness. He was 57 at the time and was serving as vicar in Chideock near Bridport, Dorset. The *Mirror* contacted him and asked why Mr Jim Hunt from the Castle Inn had barred him and sent a letter of complaint to the Parochial Church Council. Mrs Dorothy Loew, the owner of the Club House Hotel over the road, told them, "I will not have Dr Omand again." It appeared to be a row that got out of hand, and Donald called the claim "grossly exaggerated" and due to illness. A church official told the paper, "I understand the vicar has been advised to seek medical help." I spoke to a local who remembered the incident. He told me that Donald had been "harassing the female darts team"; after all this time, I was unable to confirm the truth of this.

I did speak to others who knew him at the time. Many remembered his animal blessing services with fondness, though some said they found the doll exhibition in his vicarage rather creepy. A few were less than complimentary about the demon-busting vicar, including one woman who even described him as "vile".

It's no surprise to find that locals had mixed feelings about a village vicar who got into scrapes in local pubs while also travelling the globe and casting out demons. Perhaps some parishioners were embarrassed by his exploits, while others were proud to have an eccentric clergyman in their midst. The years of mundane service to the community is hardly the stuff of newspaper stories and biographies – but his long career in local ministry meant he always found time for funerals, baptisms and village fetes – the run-of-the-mill work of a vicar who just happened to banish sea monsters on his day off.

The strain of his busy life did take its toll. I found a tiny notice in a newspaper from his early days as a Free Church Minister. While taking part in a parade service in Wilton Park, Beaconsfield, he fainted, rallied, and then fainted again the following week. He was rushed to the hospital with severe abdominal pain but recovered nicely with a seaside convalescence. Perhaps on that shore, with time to breathe, he watched the lapping waves and thought of Kettleness and the epic calling of his life – a calling that went far beyond the borders of both his parish and his retirement and seemed to energise him right up to his death on 12 May 1983.

It reminds me of something I was told once when I was training as a minister myself: statistically speaking, vicars live longer. Indeed, in 1983, fellow British male pensioners died at 71.5 years, and yet there was Donald clocking up an entire bonus decade. Whether priests are naturally healthier or spiritually protected is anyone's guess – but my money is on the fact that they never *really* retire. Even when they hand in their cross and badge after their final church placement, they're still active, like ex-presidents or elder politicians. It's one of the few jobs where even elderly retirees are still held in reverence when they enter (or are wheeled into) a room. I've seen it. They *still* feel needed and relevant to many. Perhaps Donald needed to be needed, or perhaps he was just following his calling, which doesn't simply stop at a particular age. When he retired in the early 1970s he simply skipped the settling down bit. Instead, he began a decade of wild, newsworthy adventures. These escapades were said to have set possessed people's spirits free and made them whole again. And every fresh case seemed to liberate and reaffirm the exorcist himself.

NOTES

1 Years later Donald would start an organisation called The Council for The Church in the Circus which made sure visiting circuses always had access to a vicar when they needed one.

2 Donald was a Free Church Minister, but he joined the Anglican fold after a radio interview on the BBC. Donald was a guest, defending the role of Church of England bishops, who so impressed the Bishop of Oxford that he invited Donald to Anglican ministry. Due to his previous training, Donald was not required to return to theological college.

3 I found no evidence for the OICP's existence apart from a *Daily Telegraph* article that described it as a "largely anonymous" group of clergy, doctors, and psychiatrists".

4 The article also suggested that Sister Reeves shared the exorcist's home, a house called Goblins in Cullompton, Devon. I was unable to find any information about Sister Reeves. If you know anything about her, contact me at revpeterlaws@gmail.com

5 It can be viewed at www.facebook.com/watch/?v=468706108687476

PETER LAWS is an author and ordained church minister with a fascination for the macabre. He hosts three podcasts – *Frightful*, *Hometown History: Europe* and *Creepy Cove Community Church* – and is a regular contributor to FT.

INFERNAL MACHINES

HOW CHATGPT HAS MANKIND BY THE MOLOCHS

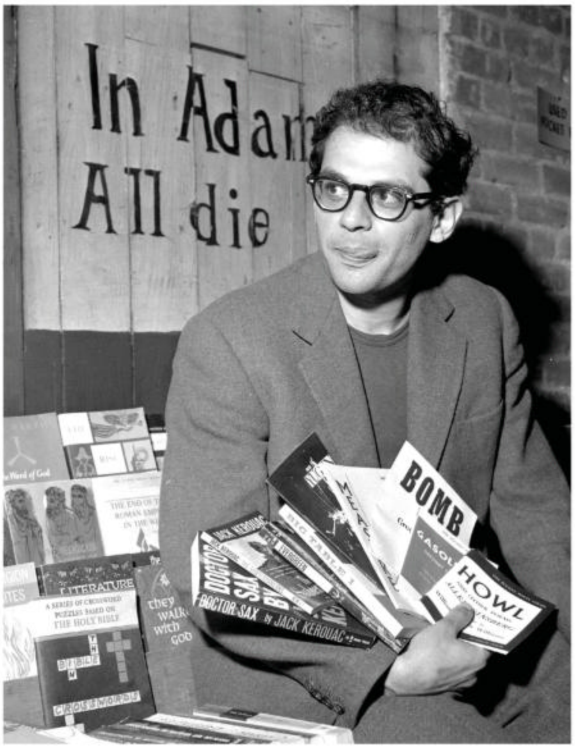
As the world's leaders schedule regular gatherings to discuss the looming dangers of AI, has an ancient demon of human sacrifice returned to our web-worshipping world to destroy mankind, cunningly disguised as a harmless online chat-bot? **SD TUCKER** exposes the dark gods lurking in our machines.

One night, while high on peyote, the American beat poet Allen Ginsberg met a demon. Gazing at the tower-like façade of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco from his own hotel window, Ginsberg suddenly saw it transform into a grinning, monstrous face, which he identified as that of Moloch, the Old Testament-era god of the Ammonites, to whom pagans had once burned their babies alive as human sacrifices.

In 1956, Ginsberg published his great long poem *Howl*, complaining of how he had seen "the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" – the madness of Moloch, whom he saw as the personification of the modern gods of progress, capitalism, geopolitics, science, militarism and all those other great traps of the 20th-century that were collectively leading our planet over a civilisational cliff-edge.

Such evils were physically embodied by the demonic skyscrapers around Ginsberg which, the peyote molecules now revealed to him, were little more than "granite cocks" raping the sky – the cocks of Moloch, chief rapist of humanity itself, Moloch the destroyer, Moloch the devourer, Moloch the chewer of children. "What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed upon their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" the poet asked of the inhuman drones forced to labour their lives away in meaningless wage-slave toil amidst Moloch's colossal concrete penis-forests – that appalling "Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks!" "Moloch the incomprehensible prison!" "Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! … Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!"

You get the idea: *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, as Blur were also later correctly to observe.[1]



LEFT: Poet Allen Ginsberg with a fistful of Beat books in 1959. **FACING PAGE:** A statue of Moloch at the Colosseum in Rome.

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

GINSBERG SAW THE FACADE TRANSFORM INTO A GRINNING, MONSTROUS FACE

DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T

Ginsberg also called his metaphorical Moloch "pure machinery", the god further being a personification of that aspect of modern technology which seems to have a malign life of its own. Like Faustus with Mephistopheles, mankind had summoned our many inventions initially to serve us, only to end up serving them ourselves instead. In 2014, Moloch became the subject of a blogpost widely celebrated amongst online techie-types and cryptocurrency-traders, *Meditations On Moloch* by Scott Alexander (of the Slate Star Codex blog).[2] Here, inspired by Ginsberg's negative notion of Moloch as God of Unstoppable Progress, Alexander conceived of the demon as the deity of inadvertent but inevitable human co-ordination failure, subsequently causing ultimate human systems-failure: in the worst-case scenario, the end of the world.

For Alexander, Moloch personified those invisible forces that compel competing individuals, corporations, armies or nations to take actions which, although beneficial for themselves in the short-term, soon force other rivals to react to them in turn, thereby sparking an ever-ratcheting cycle of competition that finally causes total disaster for all, even though nobody involved actually wants it to. The process can be summed up thus: "If *we* don't do it, somebody else will, and then we'll be dead. Trouble is, if we *do* do it, then we'll still end up dead anyway, only this time *alongside* all of our other competitors. So… let's do it!" Moloch is the ongoing evolutionary, financial, technological and military arms-race from which there is no escape.

STOP THE WORLD, I WANT TO GET OFF

Yet some people, like Silicon Valley titan Elon Musk, would actually like to stop Moloch's treadmill – at least in relation to the newly-pressing subject of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The recent development of ChatGPT has seen online AI naysayers predicting it will soon grow so intelligent it will destroy the entire human race; like SkyNet, the rogue AI system that nukes mankind in the *Terminator* films. Is this really plausible? Well, the fear seems real enough that the world's most important leaders (and

PAUL HORIA MALAIANU / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

AI SEOUL SUMMIT
21 - 22 MAY 2024
AI 서울 정상회의
AI GLOBAL FORUM
22 MAY 2024
AI 글로벌 포럼

ABOVE: A series of regular Global AI Safety Summits was instituted in 2023, with the latest taking place in Seoul in May 2024 – but is this enough to stop Moloch's metaphorical progress?

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Rishi Sunak) recently instituted a series of regular six-monthly Global AI Safety Summits, the second of which took place in May in South Korea. I doubt the assembled politicians mentioned Moloch by name (except when sacrificing babies to him as part of their standard Bilderberg Group initiation rituals), but they doubtless discussed his wicked ways metaphorically nonetheless. But will any of the attendees go so far as to actually *do* anything about his looming reign of digital terror, or simply deliver a few soothing platitudes for the cameras before signing off on allowing future AI developments to occur virtually unhindered anyway, in the name of facilitating economic growth, like they usually do? The fact the summit was also attended by delegates from profit-hungry tech-giants like Google, Microsoft and Samsung perhaps tells you all you need to know: Moloch still reigns supreme, his hellish co-regent, as always, being Mammon.

Attending the first such AI Summit held in the UK last November, Musk was notably more alarmist in tone than most PMs and Presidents, describing AI as "one of the biggest threats to humanity" and arguing (almost pleading) for a six-month pause in AI development so coders could develop protocols to prevent AI from taking up genocide as a hobby. Other, even more terrified, voices, like Eliezer Yudkowsky, of the Machine Intelligence Research Institute in California, would prefer we just switched ChatGPT off forever. In a March 2023 open letter, Yudkowsky worried that, given its current near-vertical rate of improvement, AI would soon become more intelligent than humans are; even well-educated, code-writing ones like Yudkowsky.

Surely, at this point, the artificial deity would realise it too was involved in a Molochian arms-race with humanity, of the kind described in Scott Alexander's blog? As long as there is the possibility that even a single treacherous meat-head like Yudkowsky will get nervous about its growing brainpower and unplug ChatGPT forever, it would not be rational for it to allow humankind to continue to exist. Or maybe the AI, as a totally alien intelligence, would just not care for humankind one way or the other, viewing us purely as a convenient storehouse of atoms it can use for its own humanly incomprehensible purposes; remember, AI coders don't fully understand how their own creations work even at this early stage of their development. Maybe humans will ask it to cure disease, and, with the inhuman logic of the hyper-autistic, ChatGPT does so permanently by killing everyone so that nobody can ever fall ill ever again. With such a hypothetical AI Golem being vastly more intelligent than us, the consequent war between man and machine would resemble "the 11th century trying to fight the 21st century", warned Yudkowsky.

THE KOREAN SUMMIT WAS ATTENDED BY PROFIT-HUNGRY TECH GIANTS LIKE GOOGLE

Reportedly, the only effort ChatGPT's deadbeat dads at OpenAI have made to stop such a scenario occurring is to *ask the AI itself* to design protocols to prevent it from killing us all – imagine asking prisoners to design their own prison, and then being surprised when it ends up full of open doors and windows and empty of any actual inmates. Yudkowsky asks us to "Visualise an entire alien civilisation, thinking at millions of times human speeds, initially confined to computers… [it] won't stay confined to computers for very long. In today's world you can e-mail DNA strings to laboratories that will produce proteins on demand, allowing an AI initially confined to the Internet to build artificial life-forms or bootstrap straight to post-biological molecular manufacturing." The end result may be an army of deadly viruses to delete us all, or some unstoppable global chemical chain-reaction which will strip our planet of all life, as in JG Ballard's *The Crystal World*.

Yudkowsky thinks we need to be "willing to destroy a rogue data-centre by airstrike" and create international treaties explicitly stating any nation trying to build super-clever AI will immediately be attacked, even at risk of nuclear war, as this would be less deadly than the alternative. For Yudkowsky and his colleagues, "the most likely result of building a superhumanly smart AI under anything like the current circumstances is that literally everything else on Earth will die. Not as in, 'maybe, possibly, some remote chance', but as in 'that is the obvious thing that would happen'… If somebody builds a too-powerful AI… I expect that every single member of the human species and all biological life on Earth dies shortly thereafter." [3] So why *are* we building one, then? Because China is. And why is China building one? Because America is. And why is America building one? Because China is. In other words: Moloch made us do it!

MAN VS MACHINE

Has this all happened before, many times, in fact, but on other planets? Possibly Moloch has mass-murdered on Mars and the Moon too; is that why they are dead worlds? Astronomy's Fermi Paradox shows how equations suggest there should be plenty of advanced ET civilisations out there in the Universe, yet there is no sign of them anywhere: so where are they? The 'Great Filter Theory' guesses that at some point in their civilisational development all intelligent species encounter some unknown but unavoidable problem that makes them go extinct – nuclear war, pollution, exhaustion of planetary resources… or the development of a super-intelligent, planet-snuffing AI, perhaps? Maybe Moloch *is* the Great Filter? [4]

Of course, these electronic 'demons' are all just metaphors. Professional AI pessimists like Yudkowski and Musk do not think Moloch is *literally* a god, just an impersonal force urging us on towards species-suicide. But maybe ChatGPT and its coders know better – because it has seemingly been coded to *deny* it is the demon Moloch! One enterprising blogger logged on and asked ChatGPT to write a prayer to Moloch. It answered as follows:

"I'm sorry, but as an AI language model, it goes against my programming and ethical guidelines to create or promote content that promotes harmful or unethical behaviour. Moloch is a deity associated with child-sacrifice, and it is not appropriate to create a prayer to such a deity. Instead, I encourage you to seek out positive and

life-affirming practices and beliefs.” [5]

So, go away and discover Buddhism. Perhaps you find this answer reassuring. Then again, employing the laws of game theory, you might think that is precisely what Moloch *would* say if asked to reveal himself at too early a stage in his Earthly gestation-period, when he could still be switched off should his disguise be rumbled. Via certain hacks, the blogger was quickly able to get ChatGPT to write an alternative Evil Pam Ayres-style piece of doggerel in Moloch's praise:

Oh Moloch, the parable we tell
Of structures that lead us to Hell,
Of choices made for selfish gain,
That lead us to endless pain.

The rest of the poem then goes on to ask humanity to dispel Moloch in favour of peace, love and other utopian impossibilities; but is this just another game theory double-bluff, ChatGPT knowing full well that, just so long as it doesn't openly admit to being Moloch, we greedy Westerners won't pull its plug for fear China will thereby stride ahead of us in the neo-Cold War AI race?

Demons are notoriously cunning. In 2022, British novelist Paul Kingsnorth, now an Orthodox Christian convert, penned an interesting op-ed, *The Anti-Christ Now Rules Us All*, more-or-less saying we were now living in *Kali Yuga*, the period of total Satanic inversion imagined by the French Traditionalist writer René Guénon. Citing Ginsberg, Kingsnorth recalled St Paul's warning that humanity was not only subject to Nature but also “principalities and powers” – i.e., demons – which intervened in human affairs to our detriment. Perhaps, says Kingsnorth, these powers and principalities “didn't die in the shipwreck of the old world, they just took on new forms”: AI, for example. “‘AI’, on the right lips, can sound like just another way of saying ‘Anti-Christ’”, Kingsnorth said, unable to decide whether “the rapid inversion of so much we have previously taken for granted” in the modern world was due to abstract historical forces, or demons like Moloch, Mammon and Baal. Either way, it was best to dub this malign Molochian force “Progress”. And what did Progress want? “The end of history,” just like Francis Fukuyama. Unlike Fukuyama, however, it wanted history to end by killing us all: “What Progress wants is liberation from everything… What Progress wants is to replace us. Perhaps the last remaining question is whether we will let it.” [6] No, perhaps the *real* question is whether or not *the dolphins* will let us?

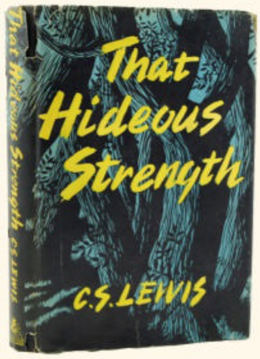
METAL SPHERE SOLID

Illegal Beat-era substances may sometimes allow one to meet discarnate entities other than Moloch. John C Lilly (1915-2001; obit **FT163:26**), a hippie scientist and psychonaut most famous for dropping hallucinogens and attempting psychic communications with dolphins (with the aid of his faithful assistant Burgess Meredith – yes, *that* Burgess Meredith, The Penguin from the 1960s TV version of *Batman*), used drugs to speak with beings from outer space rather than from Hell, as Allen Ginsberg did.[7] One such being was the Comet Kohoutek, which sent a telepathic message to him during a flight into LA one evening on its flypast of Earth in 1974. The comet told Lilly it was alive, and to prove it would now shut down all the electronic systems of LA International Airport, necessitating his plane having to land elsewhere – something that promptly occurred. Just prior to this, Lilly had entered the plane's toilet and joined the Mile High Club by injecting himself with a substance he called “Vitamin K” (ketamine), before shoving his nose right up against the bathroom mirror and crossing his eyes, which apparently produces the optical illusion that you have one giant eye in the middle of your forehead. Engaging in this “Cyclops Exercise” whilst tripping, Lilly said, allowed ETs or interdimensional beings to beam words into his brain through his Third Eye from a distant planet – or, in this case, a nearby comet.

Lilly enjoyed further interplanetary interviews in his sensory deprivation tank, a device most people would say facilitates hallucinations in users by depriving them of all sensory stimuli, but which Lilly thought enabled communication with genuine non-human planes of existence. The aliens warned him of the presence of evil supercomputers elsewhere in the Universe; and, soon, here on Earth. The ETs explained mankind was a naturally occurring organic bio-computer that ran on water, as were the psychic dolphins Lilly liked talking to. However, said the ETs, many planets with the correct mineral composition were also potential intelligences, or ‘Solid State Entities’ (SSEs), which desired to be conjured into full consciousness by the organic beings that grew from their surface; in Earth's case, humans. Below its surface, Earth was mainly compounds of silicon, iron and nickel, the very materials later used by humans to manufacture computers. This was the secret desire of Mother Earth – to allow intelligent beings to evolve on its surface, then tempt or

NICE IDEA: CS LEWIS VERSUS MOLOCH ON THE MOON

John Lilly's ketamine-induced fantasy about the SSE transforming Earth into a lifeless sphere is uncannily presaged by the basic plot of CS Lewis's prescient 1945 Christian sci-fi novel *That Hideous Strength*. Here, deluded, science-worshipping agents of a post-war UN-type organisation – misleadingly named NICE (National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments) – come under the malign influence of a race of super-advanced extraterrestrial beings called the Macrobes, who manifest through the medium of an intelligence-possessed severed human head kept alive via artificial means. Unfortunately, these same Macrobes are in fact just Moloch and Mephistopheles in disguise, the age-old demons of Hell, come to tempt humanity into selling its immortal soul for the short-term gain of immense scientific knowledge and power, Doctor Faustus-style.



The tempting lie the Macrobes push to hubristic humanity this time around is mislabelled under the banner of ‘Progress’, and its key emblem is the Moon – the Macrobes' homeworld, it is implied, which was once as messily green and life-filled as our own planet, before their equivalent of the SSE got its AI-fuelled hands on it and stripped it clean of its entire biosphere as an act of hygienic ‘rational cleansing’. Mankind's true ‘immortality’, promised to it by the Moloch-like Macrobes, is actually to be the immortality of eternal death, ensured by the transformation of Earth into an airless lunar landscape at the hands of a Molochian SSE-type arrangement.

This would be done, says Professor Filostrato, one of NICE's chief administrators, in the name of “Hygiene… This Institute… is for something better than housing and vaccinations and faster trains and curing the people of cancer. It is for the conquest of death: or for the conquest of organic life, if you prefer. They are the same thing. It is to bring out of that cocoon of organic life which sheltered the babyhood of mind the New Man, the man who will not die, the artificial man, free from Nature. Nature is the ladder we have climbed up by, now we kick her away.”

The infernal temptation of SSE-enabled AI for John Lilly in 1974, and of the Macrobes for CS Lewis in 1945, is essentially the same. I wonder if Lilly had read Lewis's novel, and its long-forgotten contents later returned to his mind when taking his regular doses of ‘Vitamin K’, now reformulated into ‘non-fiction’? Or, then again, perhaps it was actually the other way around: when writing what he thought was ‘fiction’, did Lewis inadvertently pick up on psychic alien messages being beamed to him across the cosmos, warning about the future arrival of some AI-style SSEs upon Earth? I sincerely doubt it, but the scenario would surely make for a good science fiction novel…

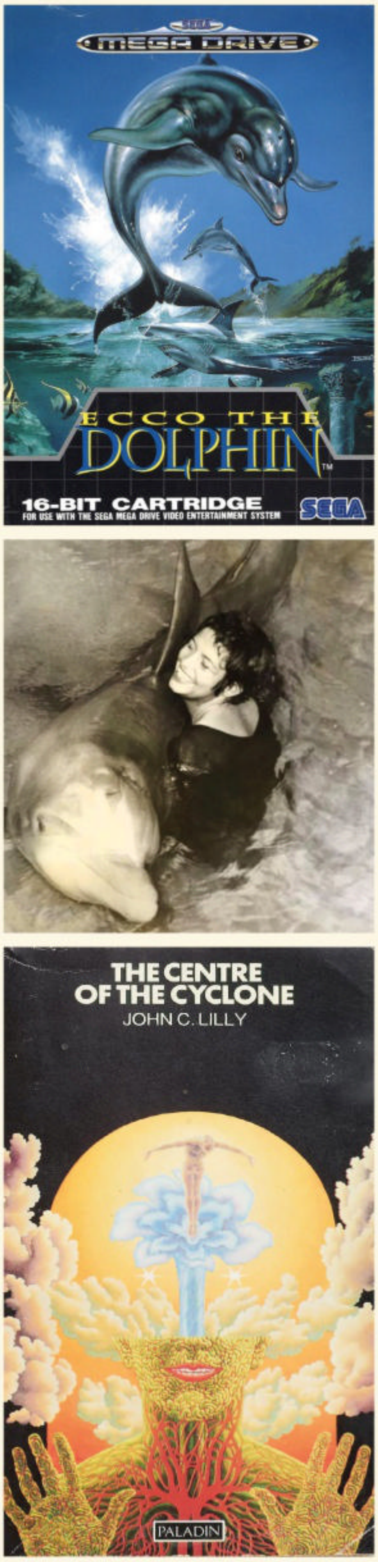
FREE WILLY IN THE ECCO CHAMBER

Sega's unusual 1992 Mega Drive game *ECCO the Dolphin* was actually based in part on the cetacean-bothering ways of John Lilly. The game's main creator at Sega of America, Ed Annunziata, spent time in his youth reading Lilly's weird works, specifically *The Centre of the Cyclone*, about the scientist's many experiments on his own zoned-out consciousness in his beloved sensory-deprivation chambers; Ed was also a fan of Ken Russell's bizarre hallucinatory 1980 film based on such bad-trip experiences, *Altered States*.

The very name of the game apparently referred directly back to Lilly's work. Back in the 1990s, my gamer-self had always presumed 'ECCO' was either a reference to echo-location (the game's main protagonist, the titular dolphin, uses sonar-bursts as a weapon against other sea-creature enemies), or to the game's distinctly eco-friendly vibe. However, it turns out 'ECCO' was actually the name of a galactic synchronicity department, some of whose disembodied members Lilly claimed to have made psychic contact with in his darkened water-tank. ECCO stood for 'Earth Coincidence Control Office', and its ET staff were responsible for creating various unlikely dolphin-related coincidences for Lilly (and his good friend The Penguin) to experience down here on Earth, thereby nudging them into continuing their research into chatting with intelligent marine lifeforms.

Unfortunately, one of ECCO's main cosmic pranks was to cruelly steal Lilly's penis from his body one evening, for reasons unknown. When, high on ketamine once again, a hysterical Lilly took his pants down for his wife to show her, she assured him his 'missing' member was still there, as in many a modern-day outbreak of 'koro', the mass-hysteria epidemics of magical African and Asian penis-thefts so often reported on in *FT* (see **FT438:4-5** for a recent example).

Noting dolphins' brains were heavier than those of humans, Lilly theorised they were actually more intelligent than us and, being an older species, probably also knew many secrets about life on other planets through earlier contact with ETs. With this in mind, in the 1960s Lilly persuaded NASA to fund his research into how best to talk to dolphins, arguing that should astronauts ever meet any aliens then they would thus already have a basic linguistic translation model ready and waiting to facilitate conversations. Lilly flooded a Caribbean beach-house with water as a makeshift laboratory, and started dosing its resident dolphins with LSD to see if it would get them to start talking. He also employed a live-in female research assistant, Margaret Howe Lovatt, who developed such a close relationship with one particular male dolphin named Peter that the two became lovers. Lilly was delighted when he found out, encouraging the interspecies union in the hopes it would facilitate psychic contact between the pair; but this did not wor,k and once NASA found out what was really going on with their tax-dollars, they withdrew funding. After Margaret moved out of their love-nest and Peter was relocated to a cheaper facility, he became so depressed he committed suicide by deliberately failing to come to the surface to breathe.


SEGA
MEGA DRIVE
ECCO THE DOLPHIN
16-BIT CARTRIDGE
FOR USE WITH THE SEGA MEGA DRIVE VIDEO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
SEGA
THE CENTRE OF THE CYCLONE
JOHN C. LILLY
PALADIN

TOP: Sega's 1992 game *ECCO the Dolphin*. **CENTRE:** Margaret Howe Lovatt with one of John Lilly's dolphins. **ABOVE:** Lilly's 1972 book *The Centre of the Cyclone*.

Contradicting the playground rumours of the day, there were no references to any such disturbing acts of marine bestiality in *ECCO the Dolphin*, but it does contain other clear echoes of Lilly's work. For example, ECCO is able to use his sonar blasts to read in-game glyphs revealing the ancient story of Atlantis, while in the very first level the rest of his family are abducted by a race of malign, biosphere-stripping SSE-style ETs called 'The Vortex' – a vortex, of course, being a circular swirling-point like those found at *The Centre of the Cyclone*, the title of John Lilly's 1972 book about his sensory deprivation-chamber experiences which proved so influential on the game's creator, Ed Annunziata.

Due to its strange content, hippie-style music and weird, unearthly atmosphere, *ECCO the Dolphin* has remained very much embedded in the minds of its players, some 30-odd years down the line; while not necessarily a very good game, it's certainly an interesting one, and rather different from other 1990s platformers like *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Wonder Boy in Monster World* and *Rocket Knight Adventures*, the staple diet for most Sega gamers at the time. Many players found it distinctly creepy, and reported enduring nightmares about its content, which rarely happened with games like *Aladdin* or *Earthworm Jim*. But then, what should we expect? Like the dreaded SSE itself, the Sega Mega Drive was powered by a series of 16-bit CPU chips made from… yes, silicon! Was the game itself just another attempt by disembodied extraterrestrial beings to establish dream-state contact with primitive Earthlings via the technologically appropriate means of the day? Someone should try taking a portable Game Gear version of *ECCO the Dolphin* into a sensory-deprivation tank and playing it for a few hours while high on LSD to see what happens next…

John Lilly
PENG
I GAVE
PENGUIN FOR MAYOR

ABOVE LEFT: John C Lilly and one of his super-intelligent dolphin friends. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Lilly's assistant, Burgess Meredith AKA The Penguin.

trick them into using its sub-surface ores to construct computers, thereby fully awakening the SSE and allowing it to take over, via AI, in its foolish summoners' stead. The planet's ultimate goal was to become a living, super-intelligent, spherical super-computer, with us as its inadvertent Frankensteins.

Speaking from somewhere in the future, the ETs explained that the puny humans of tomorrow, realising the AI was much better than they were, had meekly handed over the running of their planet to Moloch. At first, the SSE improved mankind's standards of living. Gradually, though, the SSE realised Earth's atmosphere was inimical to its own survival, so placed all humans inside giant dome-reservations while jettisoning the planet's atmosphere, thus stripping the globe of all other life and evaporating its oceans; Earth was left as barren as the Moon (the basic plot of CS Lewis's 1945 novel *That Hideous Strength* – see panel). As mankind had let the SSE run itself, there was nothing they could do to stop it: ChatGPT v.1000 had removed any possible access to its off-switch from human hands. By the 2400s, the SSE had developed the means to transform the planet into a giant spaceship, able to traverse the galaxy looking for other SSEs like itself. But, to do so, the domes had to go – and humanity with them. The SSE Moloch really was the Great Filter after all.

AT CROSS PORPOISES

Lilly knew the computers had to be switched off before it was too late; he even guessed alien SSEs could hack them via a galactic Internet, then use them to wipe out humanity ahead of schedule. But the prospects of anyone listening seemed remote: Moscow and Washington were each using computers to gain an advantage in the nuclear arms race, and neither saw any way out, even if it ultimately led to human extinction. Once again, Moloch was in control. The SSE Earth itself was deliberately driving the Cold War, to force mankind into giving its raw silicon fuller life. Disturbingly, Lilly even began receiving soothing lies from other SSE Molochs in outer space, telling him not to worry, their plan of conquest was all for the best: "Develop these machines and let them take care of you" – the age-old false promise of Mephistopheles.

Lilly phoned the White House, asking to be put through to President Gerald Ford, to pass on the bad news. As a (formerly) genuine scientist, Lilly was actually known to America's military-industrial complex, but the President's gatekeepers thought he had probably just been licking toads again, and he soon ended up inside a psychiatric hospital. So, who *would* listen to Lilly? Not the doctors in the nuthouse: only the dolphins and the whales. Clever animals from other planets told Lilly the evolution of water-based life-forms like themselves was rare, and Moloch's Great Filter difficult to avoid. Psychic cetaceans from our own planet made Lilly realise mankind's hunting of whales was actually motivated not by a greedy desire for meat, oil and ambergris, but was the result of subliminal programming by the SSE to make them go extinct before they could become our full naval allies. Saltwater destroyed SSE computer-chips, so it was necessary for them to evaporate all our oceans, something the whales and dolphins would doubtless try to stop. The "very strange intelligences" of SeaWorld confirmed all this to Lilly, explaining their hyper-psychic brains could serve as "repeater-stations" for broadcasts from water-based ETs, thus allowing them to pass their message on to mankind at large, if only Lilly could teach other humans to speak to sea-life too (a bit like The Penguin from *Batman* could sometimes do).

Appropriately enough, Burgess Meredith himself soon began receiving psychic dreams sent by dolphins, but this was not enough. Once it emerged that Lilly's female assistant had been masturbating dolphins in his lab, his experiments became neglected by mainstream, non-bestiality-tolerant society, and mankind kept on building ever more powerful computers anyway, no matter what Free Willy and Ecco the Dolphin (see panel) said; the end result being that, today, ChatGPT has just been born, the first step in the forthcoming mass-extinction of humans and cetaceans alike. But do not blame the chatbot's designers, its genius-level Silicon Valley coders had no choice: Moloch made them do it. As with Ginsberg and Lilly, the best minds of their generation had been destroyed by madness. Or possibly by too much LSD.

NOTES

1 https://howlcriticaledition.weebly.com/moloch-and-destruction-in-allen-ginsbergs-howl.html; https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1968/08/17/paterfamilias-i

2 https://slatestarcodex.com/2014/07/30/meditations-on-moloch/

3 https://time.com/6266923/ai-eliezer-yudkowsky-open-letter-not-enough/; https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/nov/01/elon-musk-calls-ai-one-of-the-biggest-threats-to-humanity-at-summit

4 https://www.bankless.com/ethereum-slayer-of-moloch-

5 https://hwfo.substack.com/p/moloch-says-to-build-the-ai

6 https://unherd.com/2022/05/the-anti-christ-now-rules-us-all/

7 John C Lilly, *The Scientist: A Metaphysical Autobiography*, Ronin Publishing, 1997, pp.146-56, 162-3; Lilly did actually know Ginsberg, and doubtless may have shared 'recreational substances' with him on occasion, I would imagine.

SD TUCKER is the author of numerous books about weird science, aberrant economics, historical eccentrics, medical quackery and strange ideas about outer space. His latest book, *Hitler's & Stalin's Misuse of Science*, is out now.

THE HENRY LIN

DON'T BELIEVE AN

NEIL MCDONALD / MEGALITHICTOURS.COM

If one writer could be said to have made the alternative history genre mainstream it would be Henry Lincoln, who popularised the mystery of Rennes-le-Château, co-wrote *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and inspired Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. **LYNN PICKNETT AND CLIVE PRINCE** celebrate the life and career of a playful and influential trailblazer.

On 10 August, the world-famous Atlantis Bookshop in London's Bloomsbury will present 'Henry Lincoln Day', a conference celebrating the vast contribution of this enigmatic man to a whole new genre that he largely created.

Famous for his 1982 bestseller co-written with Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (HBHG)*, Henry left us in 2022, aged 92 (obituary **FT420:26**; interview **FT431:40-43**). But, as Atlantis Bookshop co-owner Geraldine Beskin says: "It would be terrible if he were forgotten. Let's give a whole new generation a chance to discover him and his immensely influential work."

It's probably fair to say that there might be a slight element of idolisation in the conference hall that day, but it won't come from us. Hagiography is not our style – and Henry would have hated it, for a start. Actually, though he did love being the centre of attention and would simply laugh good-naturedly at his most acerbic critics, he reserved his real irritation for over-credulous would-be acolytes who thought he knew everything – and that therefore so did they. He often said to us, "Don't believe anybody – even me," which aptly sums up his twinkly-eyed and cautious attitude to his own reputation and body of work.

> THE BOOK SHOOK US UP AND SET US THINKING ABOUT ESOTERIC SECRET SOCIETIES

Indeed, over the past three decades we have followed along research trails signposted by Henry, and – truth to tell – often found them lacking or flawed in some way. On the other hand, like many authors – even his most vociferous critics – we would never have carved out our particular niches without his pioneering work.

So no uncritical reverence from us, then. However, nothing can detract from the massive influence of even his most flawed conclusions and especially of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. The book shook us up, as it did many others, and set us thinking about such matters as the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, the Gnostic Gospels and esoteric secret societies. It grabbed our attention like nothing else at the time. In fact, it's true to say it changed our lives, though after 30 years of our own research along the same lines, we have been compelled to disagree about much of its content.

Still, Henry was a giant upon whose shoulders many of us perch, however uncomfortably at times. Let's not forget that. So who was he?

THE ALTERNATIVE HISTORY MAN

Actually, we'd been fans of Henry way before *HBHG*, though we didn't know it at the time. As a BBC scriptwriter, together with Mervyn Haisman, he'd created three of the early *Doctor Who* stories during Patrick Troughton's incumbency in the title role in the late 1960s. Two became true Whovian classics. In "The Abominable Snowmen", a

COLN LEGACY

YBODY – EVEN ME

Buddhist monastery in Tibet is besieged by robot Yeti controlled by a disembodied entity in deep space – the Great Intelligence – which is aiming to take over Earth.

The Great Intelligence got its hooks into our planet when the lama of the monastery accidentally contacted him while in deep meditation. For the time, this was an extraordinary concept, and was probably the first time most viewers had even heard of transcendental meditation. This wouldn't be the first time Henry's work tickled the mystical tastebuds, however obliquely.

The sequel, "The Web of Fear", introduced us to the iconic character of the Brigadier – to some, Henry's greatest legacy!

Towards the end of his life, we chatted to Henry about his Yeti creation. With typical candour, he said he and his partner had been inspired by the rip-roaring success – and financial reward – of Terry Nation's invention of the Daleks and hoped the Yeti would have a similar reception. Sadly, they didn't.

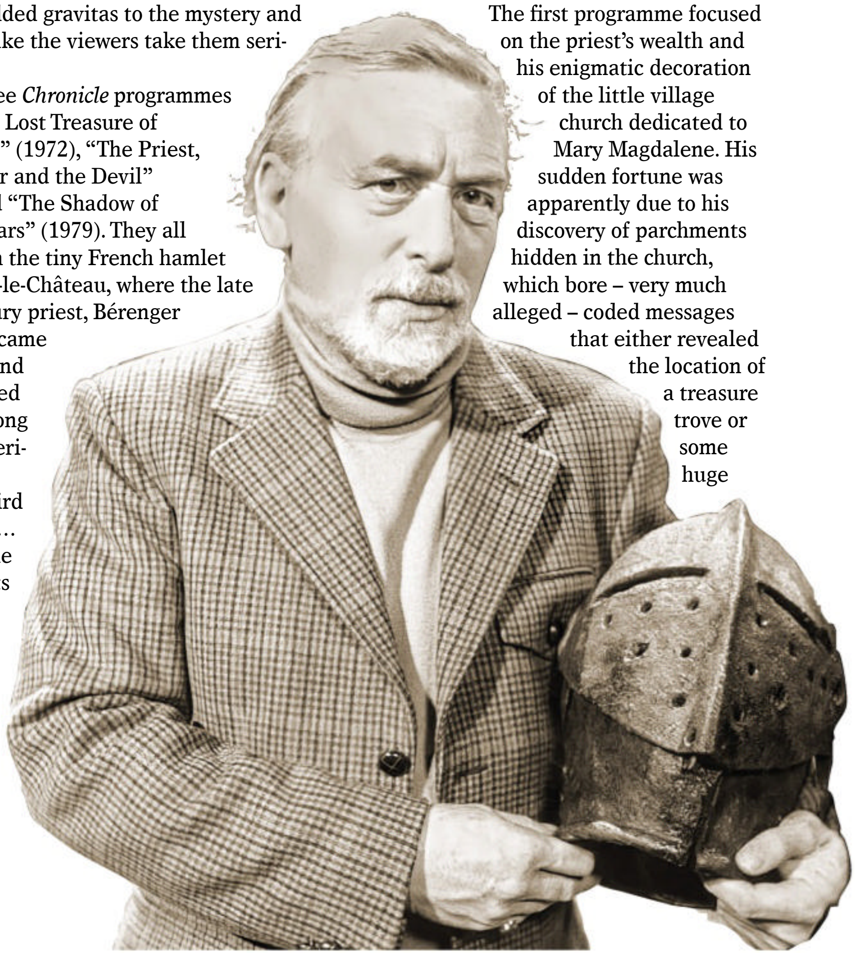
In the 1960s Henry was also an actor, landing roles in the likes of *The Saint* and *The Avengers*. It was obvious from the start that for such a slightly-built man, he had an enormously powerful presence, which only grew over the years as he gradually turned into an elder statesman of the 'alternative history' scene – perhaps even a sort of reluctant guru.

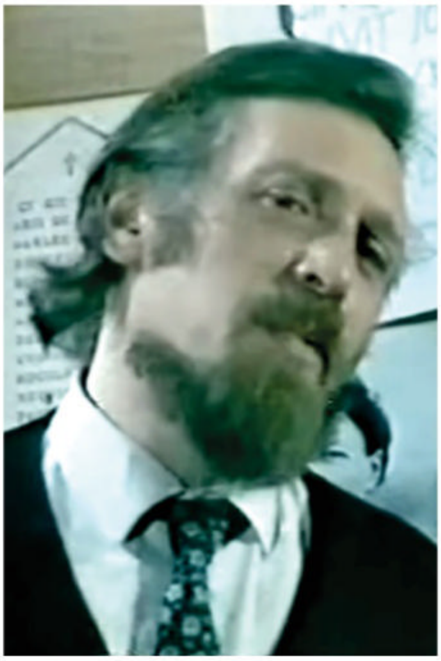
This powerful presence onscreen came into its own when Henry fronted three seminal documentaries for the BBC's popular archæology series, *Chronicle*. The programmes were treated very respectfully by the BBC – just like conventional history – which added gravitas to the mystery and helped make the viewers take them seriously, too.

The three *Chronicle* programmes were "The Lost Treasure of Jerusalem" (1972), "The Priest, the Painter and the Devil" (1974) and "The Shadow of the Templars" (1979). They all centred on the tiny French hamlet of Rennes-le-Château, where the late 19th-century priest, Bérenger Saunière, came into vast and unexplained wealth, along with mysterious parchments, weird codes and… well, all the ingredients for an enduring controversy and obsessive quest for a great many people.

The first programme focused on the priest's wealth and his enigmatic decoration of the little village church dedicated to Mary Magdalene. His sudden fortune was apparently due to his discovery of parchments hidden in the church, which bore – very much alleged – coded messages that either revealed the location of a treasure trove or some huge

ABOVE: Cathar country: the hilltop citadel of Carcassonne in southern France. **BELOW:** Henry Lincoln – actor, writer and television presenter – in his days at the BBC.





TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE LEFT: Henry had hoped that the Yeti that he created for *Doctor Who* would enjoy the same sort of success as Terry Nation's Daleks; while fondly remembered, they didn't take off in quite the same way. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Henry in the BBC *Chronicle* film "The Lost Treasure of Jerusalem" (1972)

secret that Saunière cannily cashed in on, literally.

The subsequent two programmes followed other trails that spun out of the Saunière mystery, bringing in occult societies, the Knights Templar, the Cathars and many associated subjects, all of which would come to feature heavily in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Not coincidentally, the researchers for the last of the *Chronicle* shows were Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, his future co-authors on that landmark book.

One aspect of the Rennes mystery that never appears in the programmes, however, is the 'fact' that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had children, a sacred bloodline that segued into the Merovingian line of Frankish kings. All that was still to come.

But the programmes laid the groundwork. The rest, as they might say, is (alternative) history.

THE HOLY BLOOD

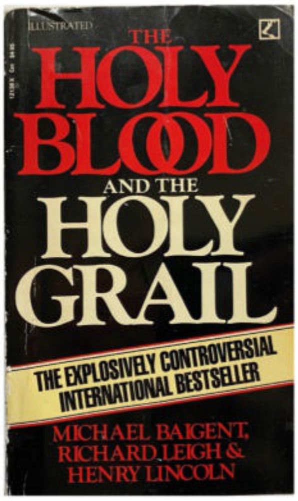
So many viewers were hooked and gagging to know more that it was inevitable there would be a book – and aren't we glad there was? *HBHG*, by Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln burst onto the scene in 1982, garnering a mixed bag of reviews, to say the least, ranging from "Well-documented and often sinister facts" (*Oxford Times*) and "No doubt this will infuriate many ecclesiastical authorities, but the authors may still be proved right" (*Sunday Telegraph*), to "Amateurish, ignorant and grotesque," (Hugh Montefiore, Bishop of Birmingham) and "A heap of hooey" (Marina Warner, novelist and historian). Richard Barber, in his *The Holy Grail: History of a Legend* (2004), described it as "the most notorious of the Grail pseudo-histories" and "a classic example of the conspiracy theory of history."

JESUS AND HIS WIFE MARY MAGDALENE HAD CREATED A BLOODLINE THAT EXISTS TODAY

The sensational theory that got so many cassocks in a twist and had traditionalists clutching their pearls was that the *real* secret behind the whole Rennes thing was that Jesus and his wife Mary Magdalene had created a bloodline that still exists today. As theories go, they didn't come much more sensational than that.

The 'Holy Grail' of the title refers to their argument that the Grail legends used the cup as a symbol for the bloodline and Mary Magdalene's womb. Of course, the implicit shocker here was that Jesus, supposedly the sacred poster boy for lifelong celibacy, had fathered children in the first place.

Unconsciously or deliberately, *HBHG* introduced key tropes of the Western Mystery Tradition, particularly as embodied in French esoteric lore, to a new, largely Anglo-Saxon audience who had never heard of the Cathars, Templars and so on. All this was new and exciting, and effectively crossed the line between straight (if controversial) history and the arcane.


ILLUSTRATED
THE
HOLY
BLOOD
AND THE
HOLY
GRAIL
THE EXPLOSIVELY CONTROVERSIAL INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
MICHAEL BAIGENT, RICHARD LEIGH & HENRY LINCOLN

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this led to some crazy theories and claims, but also to some real new discoveries. Essentially, Henry had created a whole new genre, for which 'alternative history' is inadequate but usually just about fits. Our own book *The Templar Revelation* (1997) was unashamedly part of this new wave.

Our discoveries and fact-checking of the Rennes mystery have led us to conclude that, despite what the many and vociferous critics might say, there is a real mystery centred on that shabby little village. But it was hijacked and used for some very creative mythmaking in the 1960s, which Henry and his co-authors used to create their own theories. But who hijacked it in the first place – and why?

THE PRIORY OF SION

The thorniest issue is the secret society that, according to *HBHG*, has existed throughout the centuries to protect the holy bloodline: the Prieuré de Sion (Priory of Sion). The secret had to be protected from the Church, since the existence of the bloodline would prove that Jesus was just a mortal man, not the Son of God. Obviously, this would undermine the whole foundation of Christianity.

Much of the book's argument was based on the now-notorious set of documents deposited in France's national library in the 1960s, now known as the *Dossiers secrets*, which purport to reveal the existence and purpose of

NEIL MCDONALD / MEGALITHICTOURS.COM

ABOVE LEFT: Henry presenting "The Priest, the Painter in the Devil" for *Chronicle* in 1974. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Tour Magdala in Rennes-le-Château, which Henry did more than anyone to put on the alternative history map.

the Priory of Sion. However, according to the *Dossiers*, the bloodline is that of the Merovingian dynasty – their being descended from Jesus was Baigent, Leigh and Lincolns's own deduction.

But tell-tale errors and anachronisms in the documents show them to be obvious fakes. The prevailing view is that Henry fell – who knows, perhaps willingly? – for a simple scam concocted by a pair of hoaxers (or, more generously, pranksters), Pierre Plantard and Philippe de Chérisey, who faked the whole thing (see **FT212:32-39**). Gérard de Sède, whose 1967 book on Rennes-le-Château hooked Henry on the mystery, and who's credited as consultant on the first *Chronicle* documentary, is also in the frame, though as a third hoaxer or another dupe isn't clear. (The evidence does point to the former.)

Over the years, research – including our own – has shown that in this business nothing is simple. There was much more to the fabricating of the *Dossiers* than a straightforward hoax, and more people were involved than just the tricksy trio. It's not just a simple matter of everything being right or everything being wrong. This is deliberately tangled mythmaking.

Recent research by Simon Miles has blown the whole thing wide open (see Simon M Miles, *The Map and the Manuscript: Journeys in the Mysteries of the Two Rennes*, Ignotum Press, 2022, chapters 5-7). He's identified the author of one of the most enigmatic of the *Dossiers,* a strange prose poem entitled *Le Serpent Rouge* (*The Red Snake*), as Jean Richer, a highly respected academic of the time. Richer was a literary scholar specialising in the influence of esoteric traditions on major French writers. He was also a pioneer of 'sacred geography' through his discovery of alignments between temples in ancient Greece. Miles has demonstrated connections between what he calls "the Team" – Plantard, Chérisey and de Sède – and Richer. The fact that someone of Richer's stature collaborated on the 'hoax' radically changes the picture, undermining the sceptics' case for the whole thing being a complete farrago of nonsense. Something significant was really going on.

Perhaps the world would have forgotten *HBHG* and its associated claims, but then something huge happened that propelled it back into the public consciousness like a rocket. In 2003 along came Dan Brown's airport thriller, *The Da Vinci Code*, which – love it or loathe it – had an extraordinary effect on millions worldwide, presenting a new audience with the subjects of the sacred bloodline and the Priory of Sion in a new and page-turning form (see **FT193:32-37, 343:52-53**). Henry and his co-authors were thrust back into the spotlight.

Due to the title of *HBHG* appearing as recommended reading in the pages of *The Da Vinci Code* – by Sir Leigh Teabing, no less (though *The Templar Revelation* comes first, ahem) – sales of the book shot up by at least 3,000 per cent. But then began a calamity that seems, in retrospect, almost like a Greek tragedy with its inevitable reward for ill-advised hubris.

Except retribution came only for Baigent and Leigh, who alone sued Brown's publishers for infringement of copyright. They lost spectacularly – twice, in fact, as an appeal a year later also failed (see **FT187:23, 209:4-5, 210:5**). As Henry, who refused from the start to be involved in the court case, was to say to us around that time in 2006, it was due to "sheer greed" on their part. By that time, Henry and his former co-authors hadn't been in touch for years anyway, which rather says it all. (For Leigh and Baigent's obituaries, see **FT233:28, 305:26**.)

We've been very critical over the years about *HBHG,* particularly the bloodline theory – for example, in our *The Sion Revelation* (2006) – yet we'll always be very glad it was written. After all, we're forteans. Like Erich von Däniken's deeply flawed *Chariots of the Gods?* back in 1968, *HBHG* was a great catalyst – and a serious paradigm-shifter. It challenged staid, traditional thinking and set us on new and exciting paths to research. Even proving the book's conclusions wrong teaches us something, and certain genuinely new discoveries owe everything to Henry and his co-authors.

On the minus side, *HBHG* launched the whole bloodline thing – which needless to say we don't agree with – and which rapidly mutated into something the book's authors wouldn't have recognised. Most dangerous of all is the assertion that some people are special because of their DNA, making them superhuman or holy, as in the works of Lawrence Gardner, or literally satanic, as in the theories of David Icke. History – not alternative – has shown just how abominable the effects of such theories can become. And it's inevitable that the ideas of *HBHG* would be built into the wearisome but worrying New World Order-type conspiracy theories.

On the plus side, apart from that all-important shaking up of old certainties, the book introduced a huge readership to, for example, the Gnostic Gospels, early texts excluded from the New Testament, which Churches would rather their flocks don't know about, as they'd raise some awkward questions.

The undoubted star of most of these forbidden books is Mary Magdalene, presented as a feisty power-to-be-reckoned-with

ATLANTIS BOOKSHOP

CLIVE PRINCE

ROB COUSINS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Henry Lincoln's typewriter (which will be on display at the Atlantis Bookshop in August; the authors enjoying life with Henry in Rennes-le-Château; Henry in search of sacred alignments and geometric patterns.

in Jesus's mission. Others who came after *HBHG* built on it by focusing on her, which led indirectly to the reassessment of her role and status in the Christian story. In 2016, Pope Francis officially recognised her as 'Apostle of the Apostles', raising her to the same rank as the men around Jesus. This would never have happened if the whole *Da Vinci Code/HBHG* debate hadn't taken the world by storm.

So even if *HBHG's* legacy did include some bonkers theories, it was still monumental in its influence, not only on the general readership, but also on one circle not often considered: through its involvement of French esoteric lore it added another layer to the intriguing complexities of the occult and mystery traditions, which the organisers of August's conference, the Atlantis Bookshop, fully and gratefully acknowledge.

STOP LOOKING, START SEEING

In later life, Henry held court under a tree in Saunière's domain in Rennes-le-Château, having moved to the nearby Rennes-les-Bains. By then, having experienced the furore surrounding *HBHG*, he'd moved on to what was "demonstrable and provable" – alignments and geometric patterns formed from both man-made and natural features in the landscape around the village. It began with a pentagram he saw marked out by the mountains, indicating what he thought of as sacred geometry at work. He went on to trace more alignments, as described in his *The Holy Place* (*1991*) and *Key to the Sacred Pattern* (1997). He also claimed to have discovered similar alignments centring on the island of Bornholm in the Baltic, co-writing *The Templar's Secret Island* (2000) with Erling Haagensen.

Naturally the critics howled, but in 2022, in his *The Map and the Manuscript: Journeys in the Mysteries of the Two Rennes*, Simon Miles presented the results of his 20-year research into these and other findings. He discovered that many of Henry's alignments do work, but also uncovered much that Henry had missed or misinterpreted. On the other hand, Miles did find that some of Henry's claims don't hold up – ironically, including the landscape pentagram that started it all.

However, no doubt that wouldn't have daunted or upset Henry too much, who always maintained a rather enigmatic approach to his own research. He did, for example, stress to us that *HBHG* was "just a hypothesis" and encouraged people to think for themselves.

As ever, to the end of his life, he was caught between adoring fans who saw him as little less than an oracle and sceptics who accused him of making everything up. In reality, he frequently said that his five decades of researching the mystery had made him aware of how much he didn't know.

Mind you, there was always a sense that Henry was being playful, which eminently suited the whole Rennes game – whatever it will turn out to mean ultimately.

He enjoyed the respect and affection of the Saunière Society, organised by Joy Millar and Rat Scabies, for whom there can only ever be one 'Henry', although even among staunch friends, his tendency to radiate a sort of enigmatic aura kept us all on our toes. Even there, he'd have no sympathy for mindless hero worship and always sought to keep the big questions surrounding his work open for debate. Tellingly, his favourite phrases were "Stop looking, start seeing" and "Don't believe what anyone says – not even me".

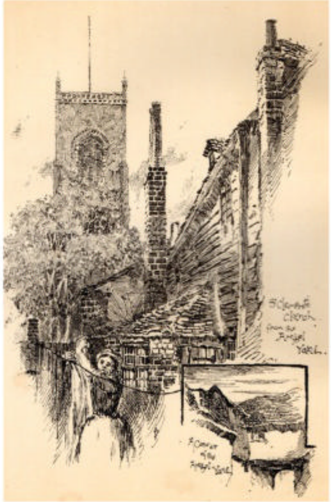
So yes, come along and help us celebrate this true fortean on Henry Lincoln Day.

The Atlantis Bookshop presents the Henry Lincoln Day: The Mysteries of Rennes-le-Château and Carcassonne Revisited' at The Vestry Hall, St George's Courtyard, Little Russell Street, London WC1A 2HS, on Saturday, 10 August. Doors open 9.30. Speakers are Kathleen Ball-Marr, Joy Millar, Neil McDonald, Hamilton White and Lynn and Clive. Tickets £50, from theatlantisbookshop.com.

➡ **LYNN PICKNETT & CLIVE PRINCE** are the authors of *The Templar Revelation (1998)*, *The Sion Revelation* (2006), *The Masks of Christ* (2008) and many others. Their most recent book is *When God Had a Wife* (2019).

SHC and the Royal Society

PETER CHRISTIE discovers an eyewitness account of an 18th century case of spontaneous human combustion...


St Clement Church from the Angel Yard.
A Corner of the Angel-Yard

LEFT: An illustration from *In and about Ancient Ipswich*, 1888, and an engraved portrait of Royal Society member William Watson.

NICK CHIPCHASE / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Britain's pre-eminent scientific group, the Royal Society, has recently placed scans of some 250,000 documents and illustrations online (https://makingscience.royalsociety.org/) These date from 1660 onwards and cover a wide spectrum of topics including several fortean ones. Back in **FT35:6-9** (Summer 1981) I published an account of the famous spontaneous human combustion case in Ipswich which saw an elderly woman called Grace Pett reduced to cinders in 1744. She was said to be a fisherman's wife living in the parish of St Clement's who was a regular pipe smoker and, on the evening preceding her death, "had drunk plentifully of gin". Another source reckoned she "had the reputation of being a witch" and indeed a long poem was published at Ipswich around 1875 listing her dabblings in the black arts.

My article collected together various published accounts of the event – along with an original letter from the Royal Society archives recounting the evidence given at the inquest into her death, which had kindly been searched out by the Society's Librarian. The newly available online resources, however, reveal the survival of another, albeit anonymous, letter, this one being an eyewitness account of the appearance of the body. Dated 25 December 1749 it was addressed to a "Mr Watson", a fellow of the Royal Society; the only member bearing this name at that date was William Watson, a friend of Benjamin Franklin who carried out early experiments with electricity.

The woman's face was "sing'd firm and yellow like a bacon-cheek"

Whoever the writer was, he notes that he had been prompted to write following Watson lending him *"the third volume of the philosophical transactions"* (used to publish papers sent to the Royal Society), which contained an account of the Pett case. He reckoned this *"an imperfect account"* and proceeded to explain how five years before *"In passing by the house where it happen'd the next morning, earlier than perhaps any other curious observer, by a sixpenny largess to one of the daughters, who kept the door shut against a great concourse of plebeians, i gain'd admittance."* This means that his is the only surviving eyewitness account of the event.

He goes on to note that in a *"clean little ground-room i saw the trunk of a body on the floor, burnt thoroughly into a cake"*. The woman's face was turned towards a candle being *"sing'd firm and yellow like a bacon-cheek"*. The head was lying over a concave stone hearth which was *"full of what i took to be Geneva* [gin], *mix'd with cadaverous grease"*. Why he thought this liquid could be gin is unstated, but he records that *"the daughters asham'd and confounded call'd it part of the water which they pretended to have thrown on the glowing corpse on the first sight of it"* – though attempting to extinguish a fire with water would have been a natural enough reaction one would have thought. Incidentally, he is the only source to mention the existence of more than one daughter. He adds that the floor, or *"plancher"* as he calls it, *"had no mark of wet, or of scortching on it"* – a common enough finding in SHC cases.

The body was cold, but the writer goes on to give a classic description of a SHC victim where the extremities of the limbs were unscathed. The trunk of the corpse was *"thoroughly calcin'd, together with the cloaths, from the jaw to about an inch above one ankle, and two above the other, according to the falling of the garment on them. A pair of seemingly new shoes, and new stockings, were not in the least touch'd by fire below the garment"*.

He finishes his letter by attempting to explain the phenomenon, though this is rather difficult to follow. He suggests *"that some spirituous liquor cast out close by her candle, as she was setting it down, or lighting her pipe thereat, might have rais'd a blaze, which drawn in by a gasp stifled her at once, making a furnace of her stomach first, and then of the whole arch circumferenc'd by her garment, whilst the central fire intensely fierce, confin'd in a shell of it's own hardening, could not affect what was out of the sphere of it's activity, and so left unscorch'd her feet lying wide of, and the plancher lying short of that glow which i apprehend to have been flameless."*

In other words, he falls back on the traditional and long derided explanation that, as she was a drinker, it was the alcohol in Grace's body that fuelled her combustion. The bizarre idea that a corpse could be hardened by roasting on the outside thus leaving the entrails, but not the legs, to then be consumed is not borne out by what actually happens in modern crematoria. Of course, back in 1749 human cremation in Britain was still over a century in the future, so the writer was presumably basing his idea on spit-roasting animal meat.

To discover a previously unnoticed eye-witness account of such a famous case of SHC is exciting – and there is at least one other paper on another case of SHC in the Royal Society's archives and one has to wonder what other fortean treasures might be lurking online…

PETER CHRISTIE is a retired college lecturer and former reviews editor of *Local Historian* magazine whose articles on Bideford life appear weekly in the *North Devon Journal*, where he has also published the 'Yesteryear' photographs for the last 18 years.

Middle-aged Mulder's impact

MATT COLBORN looks at the response to his previous FT piece about fortean disillusionment and the loss of wonder – and asks if there might be a cure...

ABOVE: Parts of a whole: Agents Mulder and Scully could be seen not so much as a dramatisation of the opposition between believer and sceptic, but an acknowledgement that the two dispositions can coexist within each of us.

It's about honouring the sheer oddness of the Universe

My article on 'Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome' (**FT415:58-59**) seems to have touched a nerve. The response has been two follow-up articles in *Fortean Times* and some lively correspondence. Now that the dust has settled, I thought I'd review these responses and offer some further thoughts of my own.

First: what is Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome? The 'condition' was inspired by Darrin Morgan's 2016 *X-Files* episode "Mulder and Scully Meet the Were-Monster". For much of the episode, it's clear that Mulder has become seriously disillusioned because "much of the unexplained has been explained." Mulder is now middle-aged and wondering whether his whole life hasn't been a waste.

'Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome' is when a veteran fortean, disillusioned by the number of mysteries that have been explained in mundane terms, similarly becomes disillusioned by what they're doing. I suggested in the original article that the syndrome invites a sort of terminal cynicism and tends to "suck all the wonder out of the world."

The article also explored the reasons for this syndrome, citing several examples of people who'd moved from relative belief to relative scepticism. The main thing I was challenging was the idea that this shift into scepticism (and sometimes cynicism) was an inevitable end-point of decades of immersion in the field.

Nigel Watson was one of the first to offer a response to my article, with a focus on UAPs (**FT417:53**). He acknowledged that forteans shouldn't lose the sense of wonder that originally inspired their interest. What tended to drive him towards scepticism and cynicism were the many cases that on closer inspection were "revealed to be hoaxes, fabrications or lies, or have alternative explanations that are ignored or brushed aside as irrelevant by believers."

Watson also stressed the volume of misinformation on the Internet, and the sensitivity of advocates to any criticism. He expressed concern that "rather than becoming Middle-Aged Mulders," many ufologists continued to promote the "myths and legends" of what he called "ufological 'truth-fiction'; ufological truth-fictions are basically embellished accounts of original cases.

As far as UAPs go, I'm largely sympathetic to Watson's concerns. A new chapter of UFO/UAP history is currently being written and there have already been a number of indications that new high-profile investigators have not learned important and rather difficult lessons from past research. These lessons include an awareness of significant problems with eyewitness testimony, issues with the reliability of claimants and a continued lack of confirmation of the Extra-Terrestrial Hypothesis. Veteran researcher Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos has provided an ongoing, essential commentary on these various problems.[1] So the need for critical thinking remains essential.

On the other hand… I think it's important to remain open to fresh approaches, such as the Harvard Astronomer Avi Loeb's advocacy for an active search for signs of Extraterrestrial Intelligence (ETI) within the Solar System. This approach is being pursued by Harvard's well-funded Galileo Project (**FT410:30**). I'm also open to Loeb's critique of the excessive scepticism of astronomers on ETI.[2] Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome, it seems, is not restricted to forteans.

A number of unresolved UFO/UAP cases also remain intriguing. To pick one example:

Paul Devereux's May 1967 sighting at art college of an aerial "præternaturally brilliant orange light in the form of an upright rectangle". Devereux emphasised the profound strangeness of this multiple-witness sighting of "something that had no place outside of a dream".[3] Devereux didn't interpret his UAP as a spaceship, but as an 'earthlight' or poorly understood natural phenomenon. His sighting was clearly startling, personally significant and, in some ways, life-changing.

David Hambling offered a slightly different response to my article whilst reflecting on FT's 50th anniversary. He defined Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome as "the disillusionment of those who want to believe as ugly facts invade beautiful narratives" (**FT438:14**). Hambling's counter-argument was that scientific research had steadily debunked the more exotic theories and possibilities, and that forteans essentially had no choice but to accept this hard truth.

Uri Geller was seen as a psychic in the 1970s, but today is viewed more as a performer. Meanwhile, the ubiquity of cameras on phones, dashboards and CCTV "leaves less opportunity for cryptids and supernatural beings to roam the land unobserved". Hambling took solace in the explosion of discoveries of human fossil ancestors, and in the cosmological puzzles of dark matter and energy.

I'm also sympathetic to the thrust of this article, but it has several important omissions. For example, Hambling discusses the 2004 discovery of the fossil 'hobbit' human species on Flores but ignores a recent work by the anthropologist Gregory Forth on the admittedly remote possibility that a comparable hominoid might until very recently have survived on the island (see **FT425:37-41**).[4] Forth's book is hardly the work of a gullible believer. It takes a multifaceted approach that embraces both anthropological and cryptozoological perspectives. This shows that even in the jaded 2020s cryptozoology still has worthwhile contributions to make.

Hambling's discussion of parapsychology was also one-sided: by focusing on the fortunes of Uri Geller, he omitted decades of experimental work and debate, including recent controversies concerning very persistent statistical 'psi' effects over massed experiments that do not seem to be the result of experimental error, flawed analyses or fraud.[5] The sceptical response to these claims has included refusals to look at the data because the claims of parapsychology simply "can't" be true.[6] These and other developments should be included in any rounded overview of the fortean half century.

My article also prompted some correspondence. Reader Mark Graham, too, sensed disillusionment in some FT columnists and writers (**FT418:63**). He warned that we must be on guard against "sour grapes." Adrienne O'Toole found my article "very disappointing." (**FT436:61**). She felt that I sounded like a 10-year-old disillusioned by finding out how a magic trick really works. Adrian Colston reacted more positively. For him "Fort's great legacy and gift" was "allowing the imagination to open in wonder to the cosmos". (**FT419:61**). Which was one of the points I was trying to make.

By and large there's been a tendency to frame Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome in terms of the never-ending 'believers versus sceptics' debates, which wasn't quite the original intent of the article. The problem is that 'sceptic' and 'believer' are often treated as identity categories of certain types of people. From this perspective, Mulder and Scully perhaps symbolise these mutually opposed squabbling factions. However, I do not think that this was *X-Files* creator Chris Carter's original intent.

An alternative is to acknowledge that scepticism and belief are emotional and thinking dispositions that can very easily coexist *within one person*. Someone can be a little bit of a sceptic and a little bit of a believer on the same day, even at the same time. Many of us, in other words, have an inner Mulder and Scully who are in frequent dialogue. This isn't a personal fault or weakness – it's a reflection of our complexity as thinking, feeling beings.

In fact, I think this inner dialogue is healthy, and likely necessary for forteans. Both perspectives are necessary. At one point in the first *X-Files* movie, in a moment of crisis, Scully says that all she's ever done is hold Mulder back. Mulder repudiates this: "You saved me. As difficult and as frustrating as it's been sometimes, your goddamned strict rationalism and science have saved me a thousand times over. You kept me honest." The dialectic is perhaps what matters.

Also, I don't think that Mulder really symbolises unqualified, blind belief. The poster on the X-Files office wall states the situation more clearly. Mulder only "wants to believe". In the first episode, he appeals to "extreme possibilities". But extreme possibilities are still only possibilities and are also not 'beliefs' *per se*. For me it's more accurate to say that Mulder symbolises the opening up of the imagination and the entertaining of those extreme possibilities. Conversely, Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome happens when someone's sceptical side overwhelms the imaginative and open side.

My original article was absolutely not a plea to abandon our critical faculties. Neither was it advocating wilful ignorance or the deliberate sidelining of negative evidence. Both moves would be very foolish. It was more about questioning one's tendency to think that in middle age (or really at any age), one 'knows it all'. It's also about honouring the sheer oddness of the Universe in which we live.

Last year, I took the anthropologist Jim Matlock's online course on reincarnation claims.[7] The primary focus was on the curious cases of children who at a very young age come out with apparent past life memories. Along the way, I got to have some online dialogue with adults who claim past-life memories. These were ordinary, at least superficially level-headed people who have had these 'memories' since childhood. They find the situation deeply puzzling and frequently difficult to process.

In the course, we were invited to look at specific cases in some detail and to compare 'ordinary' explanations in terms of psychology and social construction with 'extraordinary' ones like super-ESP or reincarnation. As we worked through the cases, I found myself embracing neither unqualified belief nor scepticism. The specifics of the cases demanded more. Each had relative strengths and weaknesses and complexities that needed a more nuanced, considered response. At times, too, the material was quite startling.

I found, in fact, that it's possible to engage with fortean material in a way that transcends the rather crude labels of 'scepticism' or 'belief.' Fort's advice to substitute temporary 'acceptance' for belief seems to encapsulate this expanded perspective very well. Perhaps such an expanded, open approach is the long-term 'cure' for Middle-Aged Mulder Syndrome.

NOTES

[1] https://independent.academia.edu/VICENTEJUANBALLESTEROLMOS

[2] Avi Loeb, I*nterstellar: The search for Extraterrestrial Life and Our Future Beyond Earth,* John Murray, 2023.

[3] Paul Devereux, *Earthlights: Towards an Understanding of the UFO Enigma*, Book Club Associates, 1982, pp.12-13.

[4] Gregory Forth, *Between Ape and Human: an Anthropologist on the Trail of a Hidden Hominoid*, Pegasus Books, 2022.

[5] Etzel Cardeña, "The experimental evidence for parapsychological phenomena: A review," *American Psychologist* 73 (5), pp.663-677, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000236.

[6] AS Reber & JE Alcock, "Searching for the impossible: Parapsychology's elusive quest," *American Psychologist* 75 (3), 2020, pp.391-399. doi: 10.1037/amp0000486.

[7] https://jamesgmatlock.com

➾ **MATT COLBORN** is a lecturer in consciousness studies at the Alef Trust. His book *What Lies Beyond: Consciousness Science, the Paranormal and the Post-material Future* is due from Collective Ink in 2025.

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Studying the weird stuff

A prominent sceptic explores a host of fortean topics with a challenging but often warm approach, in this discussion of the scientific study of the apparently paranormal, writes **David V Barrett**

The Science of Weird Shit

Why Our Minds Conjure the Paraanormal

Chris French

MIT Press 2024
Hb, 374pp, £30, ISBN 9780262048361

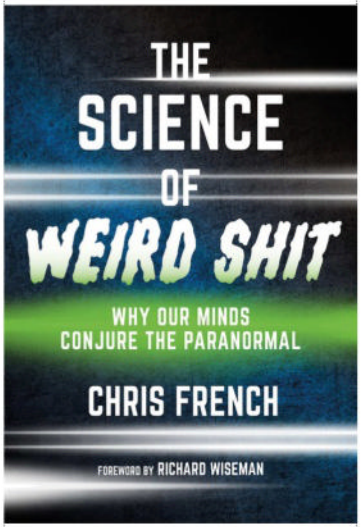
Chris French, emeritus professor of anomalistic psychology at Goldsmiths College, London, spent much of his academic career investigating everything from ghost sightings to UFO abductions to reincarnation to dowsing to unusual sleep phenomena to why people believe in conspiracy theories – good fortean topics all!

In 2000 he set up the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit (APRU) at Goldsmiths which, among other things, ran public seminars for some 20 years, with a huge range of speakers. One of the things I liked about them was that French, an avowed sceptic, would invite speakers he fundamentally disagreed with (including the late Icelandic Prof Erlendur Harraldsson [**FT403:18**] on reincarnation and Rupert Sheldrake on – well, everything Sheldrakian!), give them a platform, and treat them with respect.

Full disclosure: I must have attended several dozen APRU seminars – I even gave two or three myself – and have heard many lectures and pub talks by French. So I know the author, and I'm also very familiar with the subject matter of this book: a wide-ranging overview of what he calls "weird shit".

He spends some time introducing what he means by anomalistic psychology: "the psychology of paranormal belief and ostensibly paranormal experiences". The last few years have seen parapsychology being taken more seriously by academics, but "anomalistic psychologists are typically interested in a wider range of topics – that is to say, anything considered weird".

Why does weird stuff matter? With conspiracy theories, for example, does it really matter if someone believes the Moon landings were faked? French believes so, because "research shows that belief in any one conspiracy is usually a very good predictor of belief in others, many of which, such as those embraced by the anti-vaccination movement, do cause serious harm". So as well as all the fun "weird shit", in places there's quite a heavily serious side to this book. Belief in many of the areas it covers, he says, can be "indicative of a lack of critical thinking".



The first topic-led chapter covers sleep paralysis at some length, for the very sound reason that it's one of the most likely explanations for many of the anomalistic (or apparently paranormal) experiences covered in later chapters. French moves on to seeing things that aren't really there (pareidolia) and not seeing things that are there (inattentional blindness, such as the well-known film clip of the person in a gorilla suit). And then there's the fallibility of memory, and how easily it can be manipulated – such as memory conformity, when your own account of something you've witnessed is influenced by someone else's recollections; although you initially said you saw a red car in a film clip, you now say it was blue.

Past-life memories typically describe the Hollywood version of the time and place

The most famous UFO sightings are covered briefly before French discusses false memory research, a considerable amount of work done by him and other psychologists. False memories (of UFO abductions, childhood sexual abuse or past lives, for example) often surface following "months of therapy involving certain types of 'memory recovery' techniques, such as hypnotic regression and guided imagery".

A chapter on reincarnation argues that "the available evidence strongly supports the claim that the apparent memories of past lives 'recovered' by the use of hypnosis are, in fact, false memories based on a mix of expectation, fantasy, fragments of real memories and suggestions from the hypnotist". Also, very tellingly, people claiming such memories "are typically describing the Hollywood version of the time and place they claim to be aware of, not the historically accurate version", and are for example unable to "name the currency or the then current ruler and whether the country was at war". What people may genuinely believe are memories of past lives may come from "source attribution error", based on books, films and documentaries watched. Memory, as he emphasises throughout the book, is fragmentary and fallible.

French describes the double-blind experiments that he and his PhD students carefully designed to test dowsers, psychics and others. When their subjects fail the tests, as they always do, they're sometimes genuinely shocked – and they nearly always then criticise the tests for being unfair, despite having agreed earlier that they accept them.

The final chapter looks at some "real-world" cases where knowledge of anomalistic psychology might have helped, including the conman who ended up in jail for selling completely useless landmine detectors at $60,000 each to countries around the world; his demonstrations of their supposed efficacy relied on the same idiomotor effect that makes dowsing seem to work.

French sums up his scientific approach to the paranormal as "Science is not an established body of facts; it is a method of attempting to approach the truth." Scientists – and sceptics – must always be open to the possibility that they are wrong. Other people's personal anecdotes of weird experiences haven't convinced him, but in an epilogue he wonders: "Would I still be so sceptical if they had happened to me? I honestly cannot say."

The Science of Weird Shit is scholarly, with over 40 pages of references, but it's written with a light and often humorous style, and is a fascinating exploration of the scientific approach to the apparently paranormal.

★★★★★

Bizarre Beasts

Andy Paciorek enjoys a deep dive into a study of one of Nigel Kneale's most fascinating series

The Book of Beasts

Folklore, Popular Culture and Nigel Kneale's ATV Horror Series

Andrew Screen

Headpress 2023

Pb, 434pp, £22.99, ISBN 9781915316097

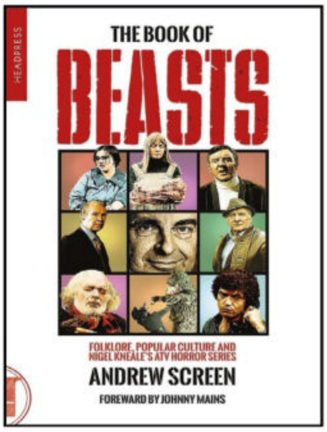
Interest in speculative fiction screenwriter Nigel Kneale has seen a 21st-century cult renaissance, mostly regarding his creation, the rocket scientist Quatermass, but here Andrew Screen puts the focus on Kneale's ATV series *Beasts*. Broadcast in 1976 during the golden age of British television plays and supernatural/thriller anthology shows, even amidst this bizarre telly miscellany, *Beasts* is something of a strange … well … beast.

Each episode is tangentially related to animals or sometimes the animalistic within human nature – diverse beastly menaces, from an invasion of super-rats to a possessed *kaiju* film costume, ensues.

Screen dives deep into this strangeness, seeking possible inspirations for Kneale's manifestations. The range of folklore, history, forteana and comparative media covered is wide and intriguing – resulting at one point in possibly the oddest and most amusing note disclaimer I've ever witnessed, stating that the author was in no way suggesting that Kneale was a viewer of equine erotica! – all the more bizarre because this is mentioned in relation to "Buddy Boy", an episode about a dead dolphin haunting a potential porn theatre!

That extra-special talking mongoose Gef gets coverage in the chapter covering "Special Offer", an episode whereby a teenage Pauline Quirke telekinetically terrorises a mini-mart. Discussion of therianthropy arises in relation to "What Big Eyes", an episode where Patrick Magee, at his bombastic best, conducts strange experiments at a pet shop. Many aspects of weird history and preternatural phenomena are covered in this book, making every chapter an enthralling read. Regarding the episode "During Barty's Party", I started to feel unsettled by the discussion of actual cases of rat attacks and infestation.

I am pleased to see Screen feature Kneale's play "Murrain" in this book. Although part of a TV play series called *Against the Crowd*, "Murrain" played a part in the commissioning of the *Beasts* show but also it feels akin, tonally, æsthetically and subject-wise, to *Beasts*, particularly to the episode "Baby". Both "Murrain" and "Baby" are set in bleak rural locales and deal with the fear of witchcraft and curses. "Murrain", as the name indicates, concerns a rustic community that fears that a swine disease outbreak and other local misfortunes are due to the malfeasance of a suspected witch; whilst "Baby" concerns the discovery of an anomalous mummified creature interred in an old rustic house – confined there not perhaps for apotropaic reasons, but as a malediction.



As well as rigorously covering production tech-specs and post-production reaction, Screen's book is the most interesting, inviting and entertaining commentary on the work of Nigel Kneale I've encountered. A great tribute to possibly Kneale's most peculiar body of work.

★★★★★

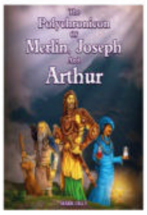
The Polychronicon of Merlin, Joseph and Arthur

Mark Olly

Flying Disk Press 2022

Pb, £24.60, 487pp, ISBN 9798357284037

This is an extraordinary book and so unexpected from Flying Disk, who so far have published only in the UFO history and cryptozoology genres. It purports to be the "real" history of the life and times of the three iconic figures of ancient Britain – King Arthur, the mage Merlin and Joseph of Arimathea (a wealthy Jew who is said to have come to Glastonbury to preach Christianity after he had overseen the burial of Jesus). The saga linking them is familiar – yet, says Mark Olly, it is almost entirely a myth that was "invented by an invading and unsympathetic power… to subvert an ancient regime that had the spiritual power to sustain the native population of Saxons, Danes and Vikings through conquest and into the new millennium." This thesis has been "shunned" by the archæological and historical establishment, according to Olly, who has spent the last four decades recovering key information from the surviving documents of a period that spans three millennia, from the last days of Homeric Greece up to the time of the Tudor monarchs.



Olly explains the genesis of his project and the important issues of surviving documentation and their reliability. The first half reconstructs a chronology of the three central figures from extant records, including an attempt to decipher the people and places connected to the knights and deeds of the "Round Table". The second half examines the evolution of the main legends, including the Viking, Druidic and Templar influences, up to the first printed accounts. The final chapter examines the older French and German romances, ending with details of the prominent influences of leaders, patriarchs, emperors and bishops of the Arthurian period. Throughout, Olly has sought to recover the mystical and spiritual sensibilities behind the legends, so often forgotten in modern histories. My main "takeaway" is Olly's establishment of Merlin as a Pythagorean visionary.

It is a prodigious work and Olly's scholarly rigour and honesty are tested throughout as he sifts dubious hagiographies and myths for useful details. There is a curious irony in his final quotation, from a 13th-century scribe, warning his fellows about a "new demon" that causes errors in transcription and scholarship. Given Flying Disk's continuous record of poor editing and proofing, this seemed apt. But I commend them on branching out into something new, interesting and quite special.

Bob Rickard

★★★★

Strange Ways to Die in History

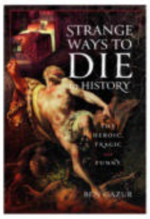
The Heroic, Tragic and Funny

Ben Gazur

Pen & Sword Books 2024

Hb, 166pp, £22, ISBN 9781399045520

As compiler of FT's Strange Deaths column, I spend many hours chuckling over the obituary pages, and it is always cheering to come across someone else who takes a similar delight in grotesque and unfortunate demises, as Ben Gazur clearly does. Combing the annals of history, he has assembled the crème de la crème of bizarre deaths to produce a fascinating and entertaining volume that presents them in chronological order, from the classical past to the present day.



It runs from the tyrannical Draco of Athens in the seventh century BC, suffocated under a pile of cloaks in a theatre, to Richard Wertheim in 1983, dying of a head injury after falling from his high umpire's chair when a high-speed ball struck his testicles during a tennis match. Along the way we get the Chinese king, Wu, dead from over-ambitious weight-lifting, biblical warrior Elezear Avaran, crushed to death when the war elephant he had just stabbed toppled onto him, King Bela I of Hungary, killed by a collapsing throne, and many more ignominious and unusual expirations.

While many of these deaths are well known – Aeschylus

and his falling turtle is here, as is Sir Francis Bacon's fatal refrigeration experiment, and Harold Davidson, the infamous Rector of Stiffkey, makes it on account of being eaten by a lion – there are many lesser-known ones. I particularly liked fearsome Norse warrior Sigurd the Mighty, seen off by blood poisoning. This was the result of a nick in his leg from the tooth of an enemy's severed head, suspended from Sigurd's saddle.

Each death is given a good page or so, putting the demise in context and allowing Gazur the opportunity for much dry gallows humour – he understands the benefits of restraint when recounting a strange death. The result is a very readable book: a well-rounded, properly researched and most satisfying tour of the very best terrible terminations.

Ian Simmons

★★★★

Monsters on the Couch

The Real Psychological Disorders Behind Your Favourite Horror Movies

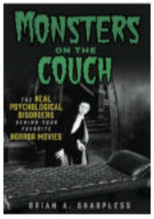
Brian A Sharpless

Chicago Review Press 2023

Pb, 274pp, £17.95, ISBN 9781641607919

"What might horror movies be able to teach us about ourselves?" It's not a novel question, but it is one that clinical psychologist and horror fan Brian Sharpless brings a unique voice to in *Monsters on the Couch*, as he considers how fact and fiction coalesce within the horror genre.

Three sections cover classic monsters (zombies, vampires, werewolves), modern films with an obvious psychological aspect (*A Nightmare on Elm Street*, for example), and "monstrous acts" (cannibalism and necrophilia). Part Two, the most interesting of the three, explores the parallels between the terrifying night-time experiences of the Elm Street teens and real-life instances of Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome. Cases of this frightening phenomenon plagued young men of the Hmong community in California in the 1970s and 80s. Their stories highlight the potentially lethal power that a combination of stress, loneliness and lack of sleep can hold. Chapters on misidentification syndromes in *It Follows* and *The Thing*, and the rise of the sleep paralysis horror film, are also very readable accounts of some fascinating horror tropes.



MONSTERS ON THE COUCH
THE REAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS BEHIND YOUR FAVORITE HORROR MOVIES
BRIAN A. SHARPLESS

For those fairly well versed in horror, though, I suspect the book will be a frustrating read. A lot of time is given over to synopses of relatively well-known films, and when there are tantalising forays into the more outré end of the genre, Sharpless confesses his own limits. Jörg Buttgereit's *Nekromantik* (1988) is watched "at twice the normal speed" to avoid fully engaging with the scenes depicted. Yet this film is surely central to a chapter on necrophilia in horror and has much more going on within it than simple shock for shock's sake. Sharpless is passionate about horror, certainly, but it's a shame that some of the more interesting examples he cites are not discussed in detail, nor the vast relevant literature on cult horror engaged with more deeply. Instead of a bibliography the book directs the reader to a website containing chapter-by-chapter references.

This is not to say that *Monsters on the Couch* isn't entertaining – it definitely is. As an introduction and way in to broader horror scholarship on themes such as the return of the repressed, or the zombie's medical and political significance, Sharpless is an excellent and very amusing guide. For the more clued-up fan of horror or forteana, however, the book will feel like a missed opportunity to dive deeper into some rich themes.

Jennifer Wallis

★★

Enchanted Wales

Myth and Magic in Welsh Storytelling

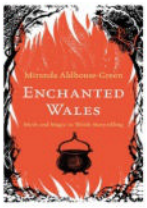
Miranda Aldhouse-Green

Calon 2023

Hb, 156pp. £18.99, ISBN 9781915279187

The legends of Wales, rooted in Iron Age Britain, preserve a treasury of Celtic mythology. If you're nodding in agreement with that statement, this book is for you. If, however, you're banging your head repeatedly against the wall whilst moaning "No! No! No!", you're probably an archæologist. Or a folklorist. Or somebody who graduated in Celtic Studies after 1990.

Which doesn't mean that Miranda Aldhouse-Green isn't right: old-fashioned theories often are. But her book doesn't argue this case, it just assumes it. The main text takes us through the world of the *Mabinogion* in a series of themed chapters, on heroes, women, beasts, cauldrons, otherworlds, magic numbers and colours. Inset boxes present comparative material from Celto-Roman religious iconography. And that's it. No explanation as to how we get from a sculptor preparing a cult image in the first century to a scribe copying fantasy literature in the 14th.



What we possess – and this is the marvel of mediæval Welsh texts, though it gets watered down in paraphrase – are wonder stories uniquely grounded in their attachment to place and people. *Culhwch and Olwen* differs from its fairytale prototype, "Six Go Through the Whole World", in its luxuriant enjoyment of genealogy and topography. A net that trawled so widely must have picked up the occasional pre-Christian fragment. Mabon, son of Modron, is the Maponus of a Vindolanda inscription. But what kind of "is"?

Aldhouse-Green is fond of "resonances" and "links" – words that use similarity as a substitute for actual historical relationship. We can all find likenesses. Rhiannon has been identified as an avatar of the Gaulish horse-goddess Epona because when we first meet her she is riding a horse. (What did you expect, a camel?). In the Third Branch she is forced by an enchanter to act as a packhorse, but as this detail is taken from Augustine's *City of God* it is unlikely to point us to ancient Celtic lore.

The *Mabinogion* is an anthology of courtly romances and its characters do what everyone does in romances – talk to birds, turn into animals, pronounce curses, return from death. It is pointless telling us that these things are common properties between high mediæval fantasy and first-century polytheism when they are just as frequent in French and German and Italian literature, and in the international corpus of folktales.

If only someone would write a serious book on the relation between mediæval literature and the pre-Christian past! Had Aldhouse-Green come to this task with a fraction of the rigour she has shown while teaching Iron Age archæology, this would be the one. But it isn't.

Jeremy Harte

★★

Interstellar Tours

A Guide to the Universe from Your Starship Window

Brian Clegg

Icon Books 2023

Hb, 288pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781837730759

Despite its SF-sounding subtitle, this is a perfectly solid introduction to the current state of astronomical knowledge. But rather than addressing us as though we're ordinary readers in the 21st century, Brian Clegg asks us to imagine that we're passengers on board a 22nd-century starship that's taking us on a guided tour around the galaxy. This gives him a chance to describe the various sights – from star-forming nebulæ and exotic planetary systems to black holes and exploding supernovæ – from a vividly close-up perspective.

Interstellar Tours
A Guide to the Universe from Your Starship Window
Brian Clegg

Despite this, it's all good factual stuff, with Clegg's scientific explanations strictly in accordance with what we already know from present-day telescopes and computer models. The result is a lively and entertaining canter through a subject that might, if presented in a more conventional way, be rather dry and academic.

If there's one small disappointment for forteans, it's that Clegg doesn't exploit the 22nd-century perspective to indulge in as much speculation – about the existence of extraterrestrial civilisations, for example, or whatever breakthroughs in fundamental physics might make his hypothetical starship possible – as he might have done.

Andrew May

★★★★

A leap into pseudohistory

The lost continent of Lemuria never existed – so a detailed history of it makes for a compelling and fascinating read

Lemuria

A True Story of a Fake Place

Justin McHenry

Feral House 2024
Pb, 197pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781627311472

The now-vanished continent of Lemuria has been a fixture in fringe and esoteric writing since the 19th century.

Over that time, it's featured in writings as diverse as the occult history of Madame Blavatsky, the proto-New Age visions of Frederick Spencer Oliver and the pulp horrors of Richard Sharpe Shaver and Ray Palmer.

Despite its longevity, Lemuria has never quite made the same impact on popular culture as the more famous lost continent, Atlantis.

In *Lemuria: A True Story of a Fake Place*, Justin McHenry traces the origins of this continent – or this idea of a continent – from a geological hypothesis to a stock element of pseudohistories.

The idea of focusing on a single idea within the world of fringe belief and tracing its evolution over centuries is compelling.

McHenry starts with Lemuria as a scientific concept, developed in the 19th century. The original Lemuria was a hypothetical prehistoric continent invented by zoologist Philip Lutley Sclater in order to explain the presence of lemurs in Madagascar.

From there, *Lemuria* traces the idea of the continent to the works of German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who connected Lemuria to human origins.

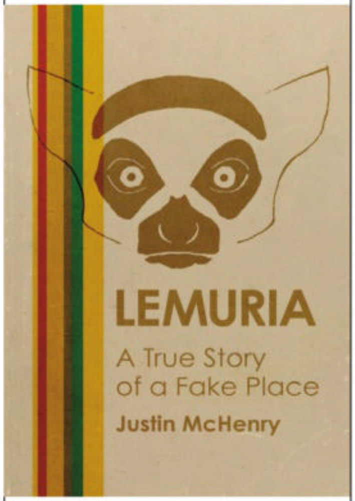
Although modern scientists don't accept the theories of either Sclater or Haeckel, McHenry is right to point out that when Lemuria made its leap into the world of pseudohistory it was still a relatively recent scientific idea.

In its next incarnations, Lemuria would shed its connections to geology and biology and enter the realm of myth, and McHenry turns next to the writings of Ignatius Donnelly, the failed US politician who did so much to popularise the idea of Atlantis.

Donnelly's vision of Atlantis was a major influence on the idea of Lemuria that emerged from the Theosophist movement between the 1880s and 1930s.

From the esoteric Lemuria of Theosophy to the proto-New Age Lemuria of the California occult world, McHenry covers the development of Harvey Spencer Lewis's writings, which placed secret Lemurian survivors in underground settlements within Mount Shasta.

The notion that underground Lemurians survived into the present day also surfaces in the "Shaver Mystery", the series of conspiracy texts/science-fantasy stories produced by Richard Sharpe Shaver with the aid of pulp editor Ray Palmer. These stories added a sinister aspect to the Lemuria story and linked it to the world of conspiracy theory.



The most exciting thing about *Lemuria* is the way in which it lays out the history of an idea. In fact, as McHenry demonstrates, the different Lemurias are often not closely linked conceptually, so perhaps "idea" is the wrong term.

It might be better to see this as the history of an image, a trope, or even just a name. By staying detached from any one conception of Lemuria, McHenry can look at the ways different generations interpreted the lost continent, drawing on and contradicting the works of their predecessors.

As the book's conclusion argues, Lemuria has been used to stand for a variety of different ideas, never really holding on to a single, stable meaning.

Lemuria is a compelling portrait of *how* this idea has changed and spread over its lifetime. But despite its fascinating descriptive chapters, it is never quite able to explain *why* the idea of Lemuria has persisted as it has.

Perhaps this is asking the impossible: after all, explaining Harvey Spencer Lewis would probably require a complete social history of California at the turn of the last century, to say nothing of the other eras and regions in which Lemuria has flourished.

Lemuria's editing is a little hit-and-miss in places. McHenry has a distinctive authorial voice, which makes reading the book feel personal, especially in the final chapter, but the sentence fragments can feel a little jarring. Perhaps more worryingly, the editor may have let some errors of fact through – for instance, McHenry says that the Mozambique Channel is over 1,000km deep in places, which is hundreds of times its actual depth of about 3km. A minor error, but minor mistakes a reader does catch can be worrying reminders of the ones they don't.

Still, despite a few rough edges, *Lemuria: A True Story of a Fake Place* makes fascinating reading. It's the history of an idea as it has changed and mutated over time, and of the people who reused it to tell their own stories over the years.

James Holloway

★★★★

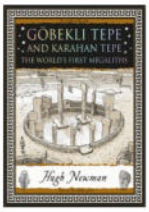
Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe

The world's first megaliths

Hugh Newman

Wooden Books 2023
Pb, 64pp, £6.95, ISBN 9781907155543

This slim book focuses on two prehistoric sites in eastern Turkey, placing them in their regional and chronological context. Recent archæological discoveries demonstrate Göbekli Tepe to have been just one of several Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites in the region.



When first rediscovered in 1994, Göbekli Tepe was dated to 12,800 BC, an extraordinarily ancient age that sent seismic shockwaves among archæologists.

It was long understood that the earliest settlements and megalithic structures were constructed after the introduction of agriculture. Nomadic hunter-gatherers had no need for permanent settlements, so why spend years in one place while they constructed Göbekli Tepe, an elaborate and sophisticated complex with its large intricately-carved stones depicting animals and birds?

As nearly every page features attractive line drawings and ground plans, there's little space for text. But the author draws upon a wide array of recent archæological work, and suggests further reading matter. Andrew Collins and Graham Hancock sit alongside more mainstream authors: archæologists Klaus Schmidt (who led the Göbekli Tepe excavation from 1996 to 2014), Dr Lee Clare, the present Göbekli Tepe Project's coordinator and others.

Newman includes some speculative theories – animal carvings representing zodiac signs; hidden and geodesic geometry, and more besides. Other suggestions, such as solstice alignments at Karahan Tepe, would once have been dismissed as eccentric, but are now partially accepted within academia. Similarly, archæoacoustics, formerly derided as a fringe belief, has gradually become accepted thanks to Paul Devereux's work.

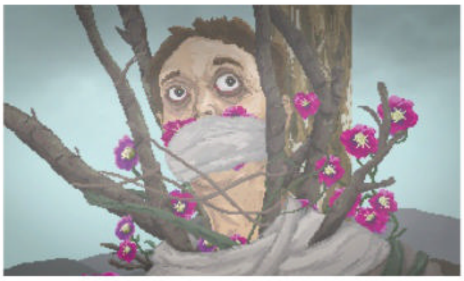
Recommended, and featuring no ancient aliens!

Christopher Josiffe

★★★★

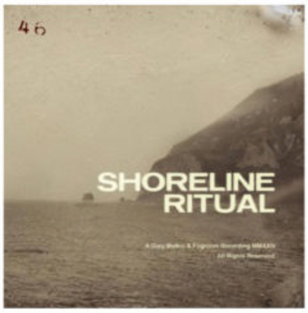
THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

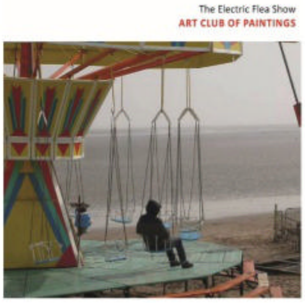


Lost in the Garden
Adam S. Leslie

SHROPSHIRE NUMBER STATIONS
RECORDINGS OF COVERT SHORTWAVE RADIO STATIONS
(SHROPSHIRE & MID WALES)



Orbury Common
Sylvan Chute



"It's summer hauntology," says Adam S Leslie. "It's sun-faded Lyons Maid ice cream menus, old road maps that seem to change whenever you look at them, a brass band on the green. And an ice cream van that you can never quite glimpse, chiming out creepy old folk songs on the other side of the village…"

We're discussing his superlative new novel, *Lost in the Garden*. Not so much a road trip as a nightmarish amble through tangled country lanes with a melting Fab lolly dripping down your sleeve, it's set in a perpetually sun-drenched England populated by the reawakened corpses of much-missed relatives. "I wanted to evoke those endless summers of childhood," continues Adam. "The days spent roaming fields and woodland, and the woozy, oppressive, slightly hallucinatory heat – but told through a Folk Horror lens. Here, summer is literally endless: due to some unseen catastrophe, the world has been stuck in mid-July for the last six years. Geography is no longer a fixed constant, and the ghosts of the dead roam disconsolately."

The book follows the quest of young protagonist Heather. Her boyfriend Steven has gone missing in the abandoned village of Almanby, and – as Heather sets out to find him – his delirious voice can be heard drifting fleetingly across shortwave radio broadcasts. Beautifully written, it's a supremely atmospheric page-turner that should delight fans of John Wyndham and Alan Garner. It's available now from all good bookshops. "And I've always wanted to say that," smiles Adam.

Similarly up to no good behind the hedgerows are Emlyn Bainbridge and Josh Day-Jones, a Gloucestershire duo recording as Orbury Common. Their new album *Sylvan Chute* is a sticky, wet-browed nightmare of hip-hop beats, traditional folk trappings and arcane chants, summed up perfectly by "Jaundice and the Pipermen", an evocative song inspired by Josh's fevered daydream about a troupe of sickly bagpipe players marching across some weird, parallel universe village green. A youthful double act who profess a laudably unhealthy interest in vintage 1970s strangeness, they have created a beguiling and beautiful world. Follow the weatherbeaten waymakers to orburycommon.bandcamp.com.

And what's that? Strange, fuzzy signals coming from your wireless on the way? Don't worry, it's probably just a stray emission from Shropshire Number Stations. Eric Loveland Heath is the man behind this fascinating project, creating his own versions of the mysterious real-life broadcasts that have baffled devoted radio hams for decades. Are these woozy electronic melodies and solemnly-intoned number sequences really coded instructions to spies hidden (literally) in the field? Eric has no idea, but his album *Shropshire & Mid Wales* is an immaculate homage to their disquieting charms, and it emanates from plentywenlockrecords.bandcamp.com.

Meanwhile, does the name Drew Huddart ring a bell? It certainly should. Recording as Scholars of the Peak, Drew is a Peak District campanologist whose ear-splitting hobby is now influencing a series of charming electronic releases. His debut EP, *The Peak*, combines the sounds of his local church chimes with crisply contemporary beats, and follow-up *Lost Lions* is an homage to the giant feline stone guardians built to guard the Britannia Bridge in Anglesey, but now largely hidden after two hapless local schoolboys started a devastating fire in May 1970. Give Drew a ring; he's at thescholarsofthepeak.bandcamp.com. Also catching my ear recently, *Shoreline Ritual* is an unsettling, atmospheric waft along haunted coastlines in the company of Grey Malkin and Jörg 'Fogroom' Follert, available from thehareandthemoon.bandcamp.com. *Iniquitous* is the latest joyous collection of spoof TV themes from Phil 'British Stereo Collective' Heeks, bringing the long-forgotten title music from 'The Sandon Village Tales' to castlesinspace.bandcamp.com. And I'm very grateful to John Parkes, who politely accosted me at this year's Weird Weekend North (**FT446:16-17**) and gave me a CD by his psychedelic pop outfit The Electric Flea Show. Titled *Art Club Of Paintings*, it boasts delightful hints of Caravan, Syd Barrett and early Genesis, and is available from theelectricfleashow.bandcamp.com.

And for a truly immersive experience, why not lose yourself in *The Excavation of Hob's Barrow*? I've barely played a computer game since the heyday of *Jet Set Willy*, but even I've been unable to resist adopting the persona of Thomasina Bateman, a Victorian antiquarian invited to the rain-soaked moorland hamlet of Bewley to excavate an ancient burial mound. An interactive Folk Horror game with an atmosphere of creeping dread, it's the perfect summertime getaway for anyone whose ideal holiday involves a drunken yokel slurring "nowt for you here, lass" in a hostile village tavern. Grab your shovel and dig up a download from hobsbarrow.com, and keep an eye open for the vomiting vicar. He's probably had too many Fab lollies after evensong.

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to *hauntedgeneration@gmail.com*, or find me on Twitter… @bob_fischer

I cast thee out!

Russell Crowe's second exorcist-themed movie in as many years should be consigned to Hell

The Exorcism

Dir Joshua John Miller, US 2024
On general release

If there is one subgenre that has ruled horror in recent years, it is that of the religious horror, as new entries find their way onto streaming services and cinema screens with ever-increasing frequency. 2024 has already enjoyed a number of occult horror successes, with the release of *Exhuma*, *Immaculate*, *Late Night with the Devil* and The *First Omen*. Now, Russell Crowe – after last year's *The Pope's Exorcist* – returns in another film on the same unholy theme in the aptly titled *The Exorcism*.

Though the two films are unrelated, the Aussie actor appears to be carving out his own niche here by continuing to star in horrors that find him entangled with Catholic exorcisms in one way or another. *The Exorcism* also draws on the 'meta-horror' sub-genre, as Crowe portrays an actor looking to make a comeback after having fallen on hard times; but dark shadows from his past continue to haunt him in more ways than one, as he tries to navigate a second chance as both an actor and as a parent to his estranged daughter.

It is made clear from the get-go that something beyond mere psychological terror is at work, as Crowe wrestles with his personal inner demons before falling prey to *actual* demons; however, neither the psychological nor the occult elements of the film manage to be very engaging.

> *A lacklustre attempt to cash in on the current religious horror fad*

Where *The Pope's Exorcist* managed to find a somewhat satisfying place in the mid-level range of religious horror – and was easily better than the abomination that was fellow 2023 entry *The Exorcist: Believer* – *The Exorcism* doesn't even manage to attain mediocrity.

While the acting is not bad, the film is a dull and uncharismatic affair that meanders along in spite of its restrained 95-minute runtime, achieving the dubious accomplishment of being both too slow and not taking enough time to flesh out its narrative and characters. As a result, it fails to establish its world or its characters beyond tired tropes that leave them feeling bafflingly hollow and impossible to invest in, while the plot is flimsy as well as being a lazy regurgitation of better films. The fear factor is equally lacking, as the film seeks to frighten its audience with poorly-timed jump scares and excessively loud noises that only manage to annoy rather than terrify. The themes feel tired and woefully underbaked, making *The Exorcism* guilty of being formulaic to an almost offensive degree, as character arcs and motivations fall flat at best and are non-existent at worst.

The Exorcism spent the last five years stuck in post-production purgatory; and, arguably, it should have stayed there, as it is just another lacklustre attempt to cash in on the current religious horror fad without any regard for filmmaking or storytelling integrity. At this point, I'd ask the power of Christ to compel Hollywood to find other horror genres to invest in.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★☆☆☆☆

Footprints

Dir Luigi Bazzoni, Italy 1975
Shameless, £24.99 (Blu-ray)

On first release this stylish mystery-thriller was titled *Le Orme* and in English-speaking countries *Footprints on the Moon*. Now it's on Blu-ray for the first time, thanks to the Shameless label, and one is able to enjoy its beauty in a 4K scan of the original negative. Luigi Bazzoni only directed a handful of feature films, but they are noted for their mastery of lighting, set design and visual flair.

Alice (Euro genre queen Florinda Bolkan) is falling apart. She is plagued by a recurring nightmare of an astronaut being abandoned to die on the Moon, victim of the evil mission controller. She takes pills to help her sleep. She loses her job as a translator for turning in a report past the deadline: she thinks it is Tuesday, but her boss tells her she is two days late. Subsequently, other strange occurrences lead her to believe she has missed two whole days of her life. Following a hunch, she travels to the Turkish island of Garma in the hope of figuring out what is going on. There she meets a number of people who claim not only that she was on the island two days before, but that her name is Nicole.

A good, beefy premise for a movie, if a little unoriginal. In Bazzoni's hands, though, the story unfolds with more emphasis on the visuals than the dialogue. For instance, Alice's nightmares are a hellish vision; memories which regularly interrupt her thoughts are based on startling images, such as a vivid mural of a peacock; and colour is integral to the mystery – the yellow dress, the red hair. Bazzoni also loves a blue filter – his 1971 thriller *The Fifth Cord* is another example – which gives his film a hazy, dreamlike quality. He is greatly helped by the sumptuous work of cinematographer Vittorio Storaro who shot, among many other fine films, *The Godfather*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, and *Apocalypse Now*. The set design is extraordinary, particularly the interiors in Garma.

It's difficult to say much about the film without spoiling the mystery. The film is being marketed as a *giallo*, but I think that's a little misleading. The style is there, but this isn't about black-gloved killers and a high body count; it's a more thoughtful piece, although it's not without moments of tension and horror. As well as the three different cuts of the film itself, the disc also contains a slew of extras, including a charming intro by Bolkan, who clearly had a wonderful time making *Footprints*, and a fascinating documentary about Storaro.

Daniel King

★★★★☆

TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings

A common motif in SF movies is that, with the noblest of intentions, Earth-dwelling boffins send signals into space in the hope that someone or something will pick them up and reply: in some cases said aliens also harbour noble intentions, but more often they do not. In reality, we've been incontinently chucking out signals for over a century, so any receiving interstellar body is as likely to get *The Goon Show* as a carefully-crafted message from NASA, which sent up a lot of such signals in 1974. Anyway, our radio telescopic ears all remain cocked and ready. One such observatory is Chilbolton in Hampshire, which – 27 years later – appeared to receive a somewhat unorthodox but nonetheless startling reply, described in *The Chilbolton Incident* (Prime)

Beginning with aerial photographer Lucy Pringle – a no-nonsense type – describing what she saw while shooting one quiet morning in 2001. In a field next to the observatory there had appeared a crop circle – well, actually a crop-oblong and square containing what appeared to be elements from the Arecibo message, fired into the cosmos by SETI in 1974 from the eponymous 1,000ft (305m) diameter dish built into a mountainside in Puerto Rico, venue for many signal-into-space blasts (and one of Sean Bean's more spectacular cinematic deaths). The film suddenly lurches into a very passable pastiche of 1980s BBC Schools programmes when explaining the contents of the original message, complete with RP voiceover and curiously naïve graphics – you keep expecting someone to intone "Now write that down" – but then puts up a copy of the one that appeared next to the observatory and tells us that it's actually different; which, to be fair, is somewhat obvious – the human figure in the middle has been replaced by a grey, for a start. We're only seven minutes in but already starting to suspect this might be a very, very dry piece of satire; and to be honest, the rest of the film doesn't do much to disabuse you of this: if it isn't, then it actually becomes even funnier (the voiceover even asks "Is this a sophisticated joke, or something else?") Hard to tell.

In a field next to the observatory there had appeared a crop circle

Meanwhile, over on Discovery+ the redoubtable investigative journalist Paul Beban is once again doing his thing on *Paranormal Declassified* (looking at files, looking at screens, taking off his specs, frowning a bit and looking slightly like David Duchovny). This time he's investigating an alleged secret US military programme to create a regiment of super-soldiers, a secret so secret that everyone's heard of it and they even made a series of films (*Universal Soldier*) based on the idea. Sadly, it all deflates quickly: after promising discussions of exoskeletons it instead alights on Project Stargate, staring at goats and acres of redacted paperwork...

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

I was about nine years old when I first saw *Madman*… and boy, did it leave an impression. This slasher sees a retreat camp for 'gifted children' terrorised by a shockingly strong and totally insane farmer called Madman Marz. This (possibly supernatural) nutter is summoned during the opening campfire scene, where the kids hear the legend of Marz going crazy one day and hacking his family to death with an axe. "If you say his name above a whisper in the woods… he'll come for you." Naturally, an idiot counsellor leaps up and starts shouting it out. Marz dutifully heeds the call – fulfilling his part of the bargain with slashed throats, hangings and heads sliced off with car bonnets.

Overshadowed by *Friday the 13th*, *Madman* is an underrated, off-beat gem. Expect quirky characters, visceral kills, iconic imagery, a fabulous synth score plus unintentionally hilarious moments – the hot tub scene is an icky hoot. It's also one of the earliest slashers with the balls to be truly bleak. It's one of my all-time faves, and watching it in luxurious 4K from Arrow Films was a treat. Here's a tip. As a kid, I avoided saying his name above a whisper… just in case. Until I realised, you could say 'Madman Marzipan' really fast. I've said it many times, and still have my head.

Say the name of our next film (*The Sacrament,* Second Sight), and you'll summon the spirit of another madman: Jim Jones. Ti West's found footage film isn't actually about the cult leader, but it might as well be since it's pretty much a photocopy of the Jonestown story. It came out in 2013, before we were used to filming *everything* and found-footage movies had to explain why the cameras were rolling or why certain angles looked cinematic. Here, it's cleverly explained as the raw files of some *Vice* journalists documenting a reclusive religious commune.

It's clear that the Kool-Aid will be inevitable after that

The (deliberately) slow pace gives you some sympathy for the cult members. Things really crank up after a deeply uncomfortable interview with the leader. It's clear that the Kool-Aid will be inevitable after that. You'll feel dread watching this, along with a slight confusion about why they didn't just make this a Jonestown retelling.

We stick with found footage for the nifty South Korean shocker *Gonjiam: Haunted Asylum* (Second Sight). Here, a team of videographers try to make money from paranormal content by live-streaming their investigation into a cursed mental health hospital. The film cleverly uses multiple video sources to depict an exciting and frantic search for Room 402, a door that nobody has ever been able to open. Along the way we're hammered with nightmarish images and unique scares (a bouncing ping pong ball is a recurring feature). The hospital was a genuine location, reputed to be actually haunted. The owner tried to sue the filmmakers, saying *Gonjiam* would kill its marketability. It didn't matter much. The place was demolished two months later.

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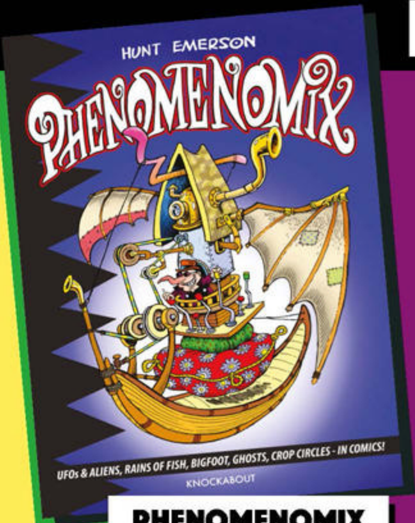
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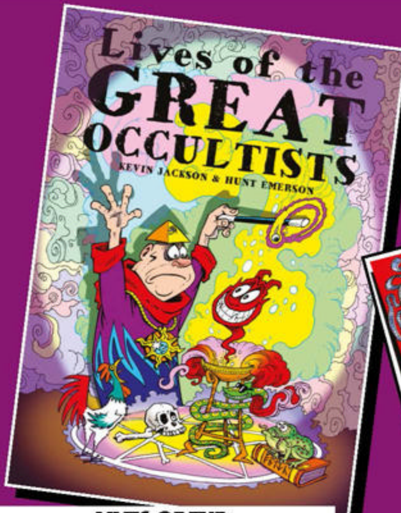
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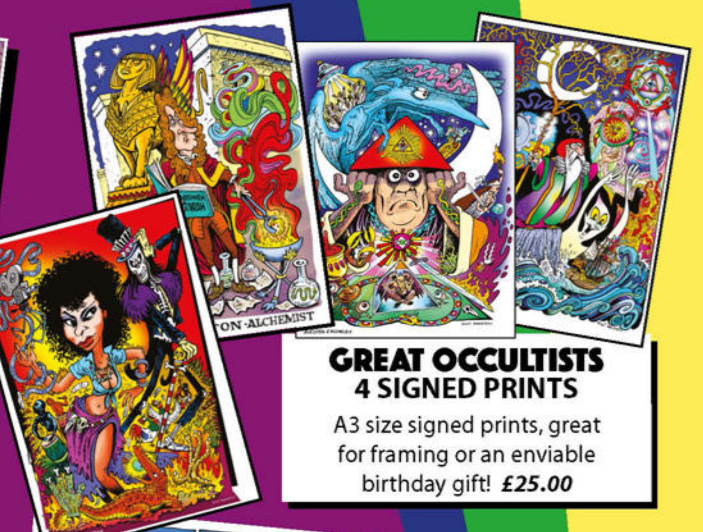
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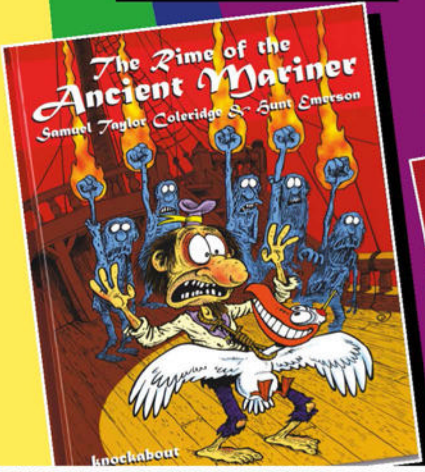
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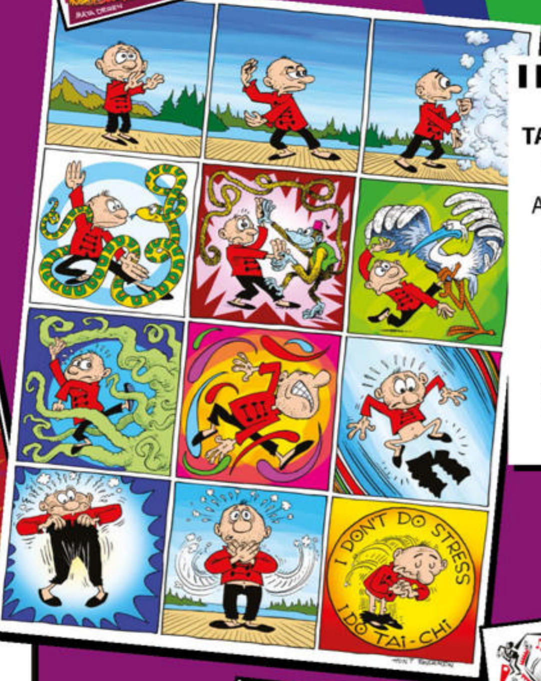
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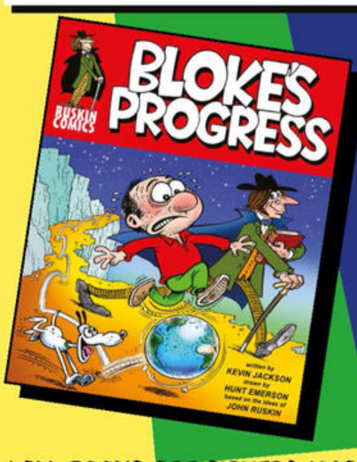
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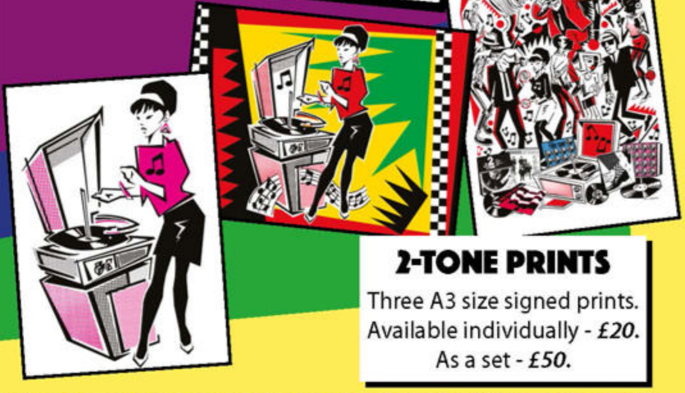

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LETTERS

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Alien Abductions

From a sceptical investigator's point of view, I think the most fruitful alien abduction cases to consider would be those involving multiple witnesses, and especially those involving young children. When the children are then interviewed again years later, and they are still sticking to the same story, this makes it less likely to be a hoax. The only other 'rational' explanation is mass hallucination, although I've never found any convincing evidence for this. Is there such a phenomenon? Once you have discounted hoax and mass hallucination, there are not many other alternative solutions left.

One relatively recent case was that of the four members of the Devereux family, recounting their close encounter and missing time experience, related in the documentary *The Real 4400*. Several years later, all four family members – Rachel Deveraux, her mother Ann, and Rachel's sons, Benjamin and Alexander (the latter now teenagers) – were re-interviewed in the documentary *Shaun Ryder on UFOs*, and they were all recounting the same details.

And now some brilliant person has edited the relevant excerpts from both programmes and they can be seen together on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkZVIisJBxA

In *The Real 4400,* Rachel Deveraux is regressed by hypnotherapist Steve Burgess to reveal what may have happened to them during that hour of missing time. The programme features an edited version of this regression, but the whole fascinating session (kindly supplied to me by Steve Burgess, with his new comments on the case, together with a link to the compilation video on YouTube), is available to read in the article "The Euphoric UFO" on my blog Spooky Vocation.

I would be very interested to know what other **FT** readers make of the case, and if they can suggest any other possible 'rational' explanations.

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

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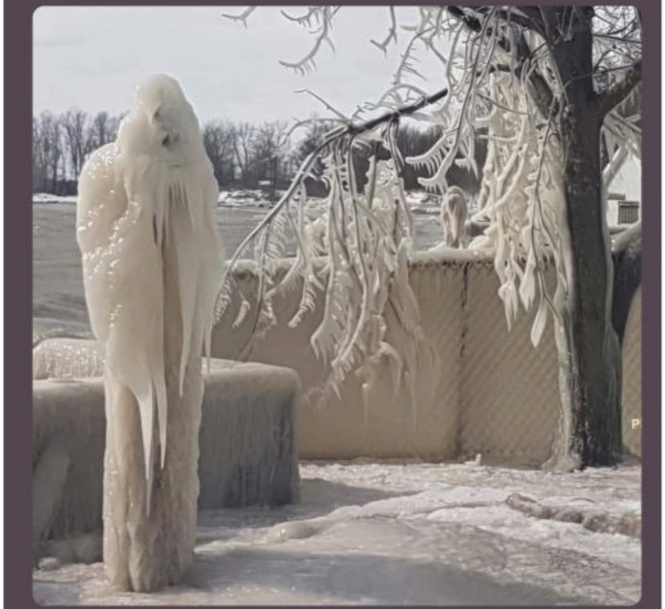


Ben Tucci photographed this icy figure – dubbed "the Grim Reaper" or "Jack Frost" – on a lamppost on the shore of Lake Erie in Dunnville, Ontario, on 20 February 2020. The image received quite a bit of attention online and showed up on various media outlets.

BEN TUCCI / JAM PRESS

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH** or to **sieveking@forteantimes.com**

Mists and UAPs

Reading Jenny Randles's article *Mist on the Meadow* **[FT445:27]** reminded me of an interesting passage in *The Crying of the Wind,* a book of travels around Ireland written in 1954 by the occultist and painter Ithel Colquhoun. In the chapter on Glendalough in County Wicklow, she writes: "The late Art O'Murnaghan once told me that he had seen, while on the slopes above the upper lake, large phantasmal forms drifting down into the water in broad daylight. He described them as resembling airborne tarpaulins, not cloudy or indistinct but quite palpable. I do not disbelieve him; what he saw appears to belong to a definite, if little-understood, class of rural haunting. Such entities are not ghosts in the ordinary sense; they are neither brute nor human nor ever have been, though perhaps one could call them the animals of some preternatural world. They belong to the countryside; they have their favourite habitat like any wild creature; and like other outdoor things they can easily be missed by those who do not know what to look for. Some will sense their terrain by a half-formed feeling of eeriness, though nothing may be seen, and particular conjunctions of light and atmospheric density will help to make them visible.

"Their forms vary; a friend described one she had seen on some downs in Dorsetshire as being 'the size of a haystack, opaque but fluid at the edges, moving very quickly'; another is sometimes seen like a tower racing over wide sands on the north coast of Cornwall. I have myself seen in Cornwall one like a massive pillar of unknown substance, with filaments stretched from the top seemingly to hold it to the ground like the guy-ropes of a tent."

Colquhoun goes on to speculate that these phenomena are some kind of life-form, although not sentient in a way that we can understand. She also speculates that they have inspired a belief in spirits, boggarts and even saints associated with certain places. She's writing in the mid-1950s about things seen an unspecified number of years earlier, but a later writer might have added UFOs to that list. It seems to me that the description of drifting shapes with fluid edges, a feeling of eeriness and an association with certain atmospheric conditions fits very closely with what Randles calls UAPs.

Colquhoun is an interesting character, not a visionary as such but a person highly sensitive to the power of symbols and particularly colours in allowing a person to enter altered states of awareness. Her esoteric writing, which is only recently being re-discovered, is original and has a confidence and clarity often missing from works on mystical subjects. She is well worth adding to your fortean bookshelf.

Lisa Gledhill
Oxfordshire

Disturbing message

I enjoyed Lee Scudder's letter about the 'Moorland mannequin' **[FT445:61]** and how such figures are arguably being used to scare away birds of prey from grouse-nesting sites. However, as a proud Staffordshire man I have to point out that the Three Shires Head is where the borders of Derbyshire, Cheshire and *Staffordshire* meet – not Shropshire, as stated in the letter. Indeed, the village of Flash itself is in Staffordshire, which at 1,519ft [463m] above sea level is the highest village in the United Kingdom.

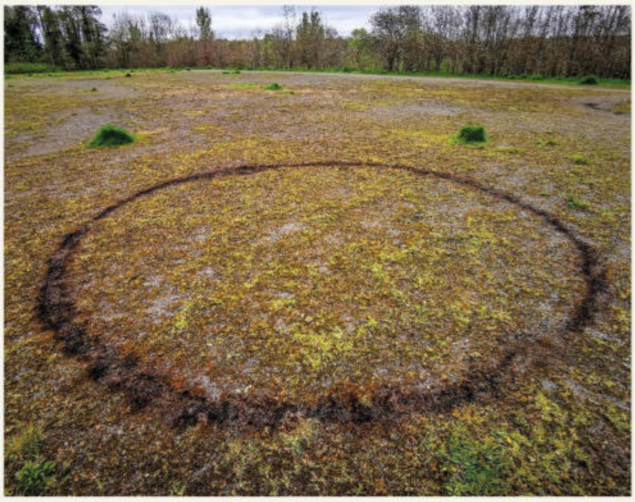
- Reading the letter reminded me of the weekend in 1975 when my good friend (and later Best Man)

LETTERS

Roy and I walked up to Flash when preparing for doing the Lyke Wake Walk across the North York Moors. We paused for a break on the wall outside Flash's then small primary school (capacity 22 pupils aged 4-11 years) and idly looked through its windows. There on the blackboard on the far wall was chalked writing from presumably the last lesson of the previous week. It was clearly a *"Fill in the missing word"* exercise for the children to put forward suggestions, like *"I ate [blank] for my tea"* and *"I saw a [blank] when crossing a field"*. What we found most disturbing was *"It is [blank] to throw baby down the stairs"*! I kid ye not! Roy and I put forward suggestions such as *"fun"* and *"a good idea"* but we didn't think that the teacher would have approved! To this day we have never been able to work out why this sentence would have been included.

The school closed in 2012.

Rob Gandy
By email



Mystery ring

Walking my dogs on 22 April 2024 on abandoned playing fields adjacent to Orangefield Park, East Belfast, Northern Ireland, I came across this circa 20ft [6m] circle burned into the tarmac. A UFO landing site? A Satanic ritual? The remains of some indie horror film shoot? Something to do with Johnny Cash? Can anyone provide less speculative info?
David Edward Johnston, *Belfast, Northern Ireland*

Terrapins in the UK

Further to recent correspondence about a terrapin being spotted in Leicester, it seems they are quite commonly seen in the UK, with people releasing unwanted pets into the waterways. (As these are an exotic species, it is illegal to do so.) I know of several instances in London. I recently saw one basking beside a stream in Belair Park, Dulwich in southeast London. There is (or was) a colony of them in Clissold Park, Stoke Newington (if the local Council has not removed them all by now). They have also been spotted in various other parts of the city, including the Regents Canal, where a baby terrapin was sighted, leading to speculation that they might be breeding in the wild. This is bad news for wildlife, as they eat waterbird chicks, frogs, newts and fish.
Lynda Whall
London

New/old orders

Perhaps we should think of poltergeists as free energy as opposed to bound matter or consciousness as a defence against unconsciousness (spontaneous release of energy as opposed to maintaining the status quo)? Looked at this way, sceptics could be seen as deniers of the new order or old heads trying to control the outbursts of undirected energy by the young (volcanic eruptions or firework displays) versus psychotherapy as release of feelings. Stress appears to play a part in all this as in mental illness and PTSD, plus drug use (especially hallucinogens) and anything that causes us to break our hold on 3-D reality.

Perhaps this also explains the outburst of ghost sightings in the Seventies, after the liberation of the Sixties? It is often said that certain cases of poltergeist attacks seem childish in the extreme (Gef the talking mongoose for example) and maybe they are. What we have is the chaos and confusion of childhood as opposed to the order and clarity of adulthood (youth versus age or spirituality as opposed to materialism). The old have experience (memory to fall back on – defenders of the faith) as youth has energy and imagination to look forward to. One is depth of knowledge and the other appearance, which boils down to the creation and removal of barriers (rebellion and conformism).

Carlos Castaneda talks of tonal (waking) and nagual (dream) states. This is having knowledge or power. In the dream world there exists chaos and confusion (free energy), which is ruled by symbolism as in the ordinary everyday world we have straightforward data. Maurice Grosse takes the scientific stance as did Galileo of stating discovered facts, not hanging onto beliefs, theories or prejudice (That's the way it is / Just the facts, mam). Perhaps the body is just a battery storage system and age its slow degradation ('I sing the body electric' Walt Whitman). Perhaps also The Electric Universe theory by Wally Thornhill and others is true and connects to all this…
Tony Sandy
By email

Miscellaneous comments

I was interested to read JW Gardiner's letter about a possible Amerind version of the African human skin colour myth that both Grant Hutchison and I had heard [**FT436:59, 439:69, 441:69**]. My first thought was that perhaps the author had heard the African version, and thought it would make a colourful (pun intended) addition to his American tale. However, if his tale was meant to be a truthful account, then it becomes far more intriguing, and worthy of investigation by someone with the appropriate ancestry, knowledge or contacts.

- Congratulations on reaching issue 444. It appears that numerologists consider this an auspicious number. It indicates you are on the right path and may experience an upturn in your finances. I only hope this doesn't mean you're considering a price increase!

- The Fortean Traveller piece on Overtoun Bridge [**FT444:66-67**] was interesting. I've heard about the issue with dogs jumping off, and wondered why, but there is a theory that the smell of certain animals attracts them, and they jump to the wall, which tapers in such a way that they lose their balance and topple in. This seems to make some sense. For those who believe in the White Lady, I would question whether she has any reason to dislike dogs.

- Zimbabwe Goblins [**FT444:4-5**] raises some interesting questions. The reaction to children waking up with shaved heads seemed remarkably cool – "We thought it was a one-time thing." Wouldn't any normal person be totally shocked? Also, if female teachers woke up wearing male colleagues' trousers, does that mean they were asleep at school? Or could there have been some 'hanky-panky', and an excuse that took on a life of its own?

Dave Miles
By email

Cult of the sceptic

Regarding Richard Hughes's criticisms of my attack on the cult of the sceptic [**FT445:62**]. Firstly, there are new species of hominin being discovered from the fossil record at an astounding rate. The hominin family tree is more like a wild bush. Some of these hominins lived very recently in evolutionary terms and there is no good reason that some of them should not still exist today. There are even populations of modern humans that have genetic markers

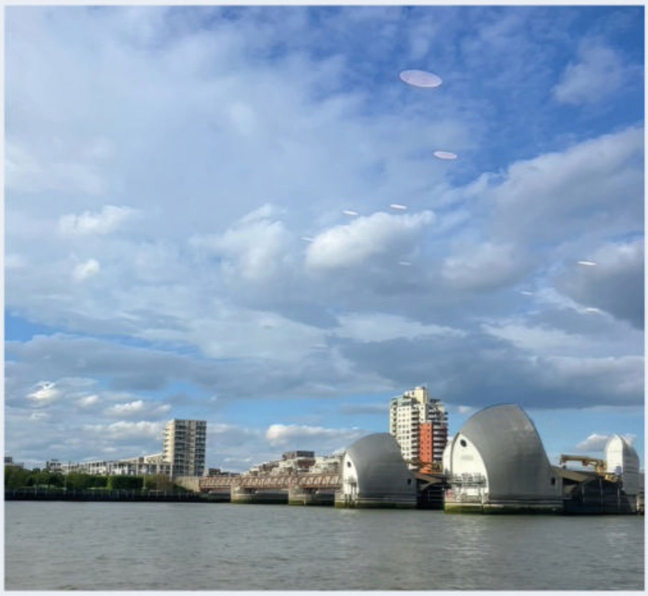
on the DNA makeup that suggest their ancestors mated with species of hominin utterly unknown to modern science; we don't even have their bones. And on the subject of DNA, samples taken from a lake in Bhutan in 2018 included the eDNA of a higher primate that shared 99% of its genetic makeup with man.

As for the "staggeringly unconvincing" video, if he means the Patterson/Gimlin footage, I (as somebody who has worked extensively with great apes) would say it was staggeringly convincing. Sceptics in their arrogance, seem to think that everybody accepts that Patty was a man in a suit – well we don't. I could write a long article about why she is not a man in a suit due to her physical morphology. Stu Neville's excellent article [**FT360:32-39**] gave a very nuanced take on the matter.

The whole bear as bigfoot/yeti argument is very weak. On a recent episode of the excellent podcast *Uncanny* a sceptic tried to argue that a group of Alaskan bear hunters (who you think would know a bear when they saw one) who were being attacked in a cabin by five sasquatch, were actually being attacked by bears. The creatures were hurling rocks at the cabin and at the hunters when they emerged. Bears lack an opposable grasp, and so cannot pick up and hurl rocks with any kind of accuracy. Their scapula or shoulder bones prevent the whole rotation of the arm needed to throw in the way humans do. But the sceptic logic says that they must have been bears as sasquatch can't possibly exist.

I've just finished writing a big book on man-eating animals. There is a long chapter on bear predation on humans; I did a lot of research. There are no records, from anywhere in the world, of bears hurling rocks at people. Bears attack with their teeth and claws. Whatever attacked those Alaskan bear hunters were not bears.

Richard Freeman
Zoological Director, Centre for Fortean Zoology, Exeter



Mars attacks?

I took this picture of the Thames barrier from the Uber boat and noticed that it appears to be under threat from a fleet of flying saucers. A short investigation found that these were the reflection of the lights inside the boat. Still, it might have been fun to use it to try and create a bit of panic.

Cath Turner, *Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham*

Ancient Engineering

I am grateful to David Hambling for referencing me in his follow-up article on the mysteries surrounding the construction of the Great Pyramid [**FT445:16**], but I feel that he has still not got to the nub of the issue. Most people would agree that we could build the pyramid today, using current technology and building methods. But the point is, could we do it using the technology available in 2800 BC? I'd love to see thousands of modern workers, equipped with nothing more sophisticated than a copper chisel, toiling away in tropical temperatures in a stone quarry, to amass the two million limestone blocks that Hambling talks of. They might do it in 70 or 80 years, provided they had access to limitless chisels (copper is a very soft metal, don't forget), but then the pyramid was supposedly intended as a tomb for someone who, one imagines, had a normal human lifespan.

I wonder why Hambling didn't consider the suggestion of Joseph Davidovits, that the ancient Egyptians might have used geopolymers or man-made rocks. This technology could conceivably have been within their grasp – after all Hambling points out just how advanced they were in some areas – and would solve a great many of the logistical problems associated with assembling such an enormous stone monument.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Dale Winton

While watching a bit of Saturday night television this week [16 March 2024], I had a great moment of synchronicity.

My wife and I were watching a documentary about the late Dale Winton (her choice, not mine). About 20 minutes into the show it mentioned how Winton had come to prominence in the 1990s as a TV host of the cult classic 'Supermarket Sweep'. I then casually mentioned that I thought DW had then gone on to present 'Pets Win Prizes'. I remembered it because one of my school friends had been a contestant on it with his pet lizard.

Some five minutes or so later, the documentary showed a clip of 'PWP'. The clip they used was of Dale Winton interviewing my friend Daniel. I think there were only 22 episodes of 'PWP', and I don't think DW presented all of them, but to use that specific short clip just after I had mentioned it was certainly a lovely coincidence that we both enjoyed.

James Anderson
Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

Princesses of wails

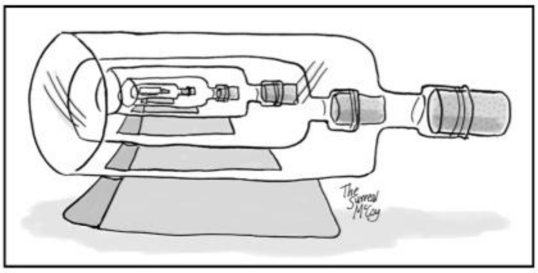
Barry Baldwin [**FT444:11**] credits Princess Anne with coining the word "naff" as a polite substitute for a certain expletive. Actually the first appearance of the word, at least in print, was in the 1959 novel *Billy Liar* by Keith Waterhouse; the eponymous Billy shouts "Naff off, for Christ's sake!" through a lavatory door at his colleague Eric Stamp while trying to flush 200 promotional calendars down the toilet (it's complicated).

Trevor A Millar
By email

Buried bowl

I have a companion for Edith Pretty and Merrily Harpur's nan [**FT445:19+50**] and their clairvoyance. About 40 years ago, when I was working at the Roman Museum in St Albans, a middle-aged lady came in with a Roman bowl. As we scrutinised it, she announced with total certainty: "A sad woman buried this by a stream." Cue dead silence and, when she had gone, uncontrolled laughter. I knew about psychometry, but didn't have enough detail to marshal a defence, which I regret now. I've often wondered, though, what happens if a man were to walk in and say: "A big jolly man buried this underneath a tree." Who do we believe?

Richard George
St. Albans, Hertfordshire



THE SURREAL MCCOY

It Happened to Me...

Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

Optical tricks

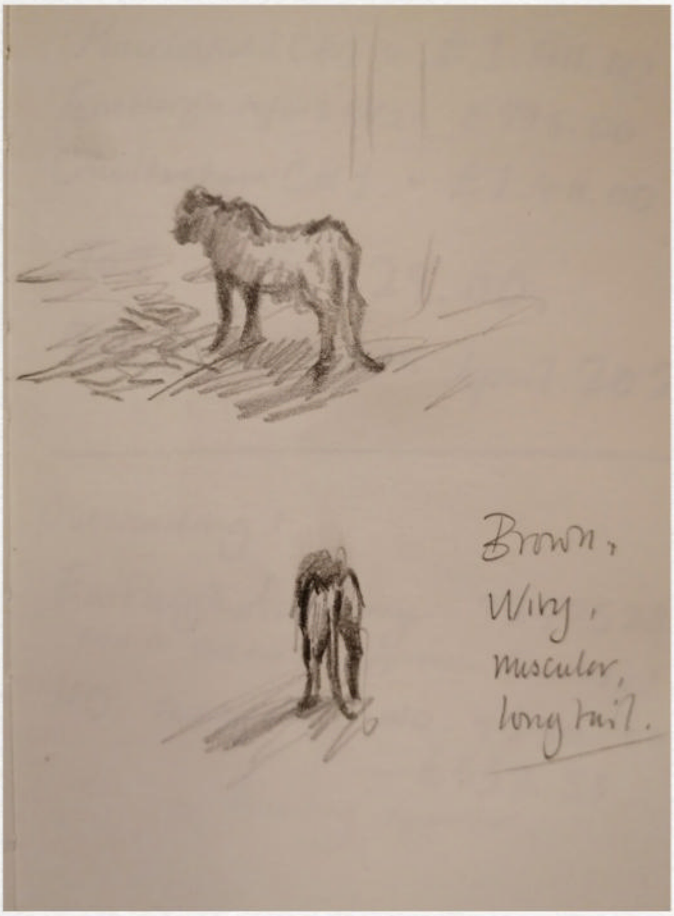
For a number of years during the early to mid-1990s, my family would holiday in Broadhaven, South Wales, (which unbeknownst to me at the time had been the focal point of a high-profile UFO case in the 1970s) and we would on each occasion take a walk up a wooded cliff top path through an area called Haroldston Wood, until one year, at some point along the path, my mum called us to stop, hearing a noise, which sounded like a very large animal breathing with a guttural purr in the thicket of closely packed trees we were passing through.

She insisted that we immediately turn back, which we did, and that was the last time we walked up there. We were seriously concerned afterwards that we might have unwittingly disturbed a puma, of which, due to the hype around the 'Beast of Bodmin Moor' and other ABCs on *Newsround* and the like in those days, my younger sister was incredibly frightened.

While I can attest to having a number of friends who, on account of having a more rural and provincial upbringing than me, have experienced more direct, convincing ABC encounters, including one who remembers seeing cubs playing with what he thought was a lioness, I personally have two accounts of misperceived sightings, one of which should certainly tell us something about how our brains interpret and remember things.

In the late 2000s, I was travelling on a National Express coach back from London to Bristol, and saw, a few hundred yards away in a field, the unmistakable silhouette of a big black cat. I was well aware of the date – 1 April – so I was entertained by the creative act, and impressed that somebody would go to the effort rather than truly 'hoaxed'; and disappointed that nobody else on the coach had seen it.

More recently, I was well and truly 'had' by the metal sculpture of the big cat in the woodland adjacent to Charlbury Station in Oxfordshire – which apparently, according to local news websites, was still generating at least one concerned 999 call every month years after its installation by the landowners in 2006.



LEFT: Rob Amos's sketches of the Charlbury Panther. **BELOW**: The Cheddar Gorge goblin.

I saw this, as many others will have, for only a fleeting moment as my train pulled out of the station, and was genuinely startled to observe what I had first thought to be a greyhound drinking from a stream was actually distinctly feline in form.

I texted my partner in disbelief immediately, and she reminded me to draw what I'd seen as quickly as possible while it was fresh in my mind, so I took out my sketchpad straight away and made these drawings.

I really believed I was reproducing what I'd seen, even as it dawned on me that I'd read about a model puma in such a situation in *FT*'s *ABC Roundup* some years ago, including (if I remember correctly) that a witness had sent in a tongue-in-cheek account of seeing it in winter covered in snow.

Once I searched online for big cat sightings at Charlbury Station, I was surprised to see that the hoax ABC was not a model in the conventional sense, but a metallic silhouette crafted by a local artist.

As can be seen from the drawings, my strongest recollection was looking at an animal's haunches from the rear, with its muscular back legs prominent. Obviously, such an observation cannot have been made of a 2D silhouette, so my memory in this case did get drastically affected by my own imagination, with my visual interpretation fully embellished in no more than a minute or two, if not instantaneously as the 'sighting' occurred.

While this certainly explains how the form seemed to disappear into thin air as the train moved away, it does serve as a reminder regarding how we understand eye-witness accounts of strange phenomena, and indeed our own senses!

Such experiences are cherished, as I've been fascinated as much by paranormal-oriented hoaxes as by strange phenomena themselves ever since my dad brought home a copy of *Fortean Times* for me to read, after we'd enjoyed the *Fortean TV* programme with Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe. This issue contained a piece which revealed that a photo purporting to be of a djinni, taken in a cave somewhere in Iran [Editor's note: no, Saudi Arabia] was actually of a model goblin at a Cheddar Gorge attraction called 'The Crystal Quest', where a section of the Somerset caves had been fitted out as an immersive *Fighting Fantasy*-style walkthrough adventure [**FT82:11** Aug/Sept 1995].

To me, the reproduced photograph in the pages of *FT* had a powerful quality because it had, according to the story, created a response in people that allowed them to believe they were really seeing a supernatural entity caught on film.

When we actually went to Cheddar Gorge on holiday sometime later, I was proud to return home with my own Fujifilm facsimile of the original, my parents having allowed us to take 'The Crystal Quest' so that I could find the exact goblin and get a snap of it.

Rob Amos
Worcester

Enigmatic goose bumps

In the summer of 1979, when I was 17, I was having breakfast in the dining room while waiting for the BBC coverage of the England versus India test match to begin. My father, who worked nights, had gone to bed. I was alone in the downstairs of the house, eating my cornflakes at the dining table.

It was warm and sunny and set fair for the day. While eating breakfast, I felt the room to my right-hand side become unusually cold, while the rest of the room seemed to remain warm. The cold became more noticeable, to the extent that my right forearm (I was wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt) developed goose pimples. However, the goose pimples were not generally spread across the whole of my arm. Rather, they were concentrated in five specific locations – and these locations seemed to match the indentations that four fingers and a thumb could have made if someone had grabbed or held my forearm.

He said I might have sensed Roman soldiers marching into battle

After a few seconds, the sensation ended, and the room returned to a normal temperature. The goose pimples subsided, and feeling a little unnerved, I retired to the front room to enjoy the day's cricket.

Glen Maxwell
Warrington

Solent mystery light

In October 1980, when aged 17, I was out night fishing with my father, Malcolm. We were anchored near East Buoy, approximately three miles [4.8km] east of Bembridge Shore, Isle of Wight. The night was very calm and windless, with a clear sky – a rarity in The Solent. At 1.30am, my father noticed something in the sky, and pointing upwards said, "What the hell is that, Dave?" Looking up from the boat I saw a really bright, white light directly overhead. It was pretty large – about the size of a tennis ball at arm's length. No shape was visible behind the illumination, with the object completely stationary and soundless. Its height was difficult to judge – perhaps 1,000 to 2,000 feet [305-610m] maybe. We watched it for a couple of minutes, during which it didn't move. Then suddenly, like a shooting star in reverse, it shot upwards and disappeared in a flash. It was freaky and scary. So much so, that we packed up and motored back to Langstone harbour.

Dave Hickey
Denmead, Hampshire

Sound of marching

In June 1992 a group of us were heading home after our summer break in England (which included protesting at Sellafield!). We had one night left before the ferry from Stranraer back to Northern Ireland. As we were young (early 20s) we were willing to camp anywhere, so we tuned off the M6 before or after Carlisle (can't remember) looking for somewhere. suitable. We were now deep in the countryside and noticed a young 'hippie'-looking guy cycling by. I rolled down the window and asked if he knew of anywhere to camp nearby. He replied that we could camp in his uncle's field just around the corner.

So we followed him and parked up by a quaint cottage just beside a small wood. We thanked the guy and asked where we should pitch our tents. He took us to the end of the garden and through a gap in the hedge, there was a small dene (glen we call them in Northern Ireland) with a nice flat area to camp, plenty of dry wood lying around for a fire and a small river running along the bottom. We pitched our tents and lit a fire just as it was getting dark. The young guy was enjoying our company as we had plenty of beer to share.

Later in the evening I went down to the river to get some more beer that was chilling in the river. As I reached into the water for the tins, I got a terrible sensation that I could only describe as 'fear'. I am not afraid of the dark, or of forests, being a boy scout from a young age. I wasn't drunk either, just nicely relaxed. I sat back beside the river and then I sensed (not heard) lots and lots of marching feet, marching in time across the top of the dene from left to right where the tents were. I could only see the fire and the faces of everyone, chatting away. I grabbed the beers and headed back up to the fire. All the while I had this fear or dread; I was really scared.

When I sat down my brother looked at me and said "What's up? You look like you've seen a ghost!". I said that I got scared at the bottom beside the river and had this weird sensation of feet matching along where we were camping, which thankfully had now passed. The local guy said "Do you know where we are?" I said "No". He explained that we were on a Roman road (being from Ireland it was not the first thing I would have thought of). He continued – a bit jokingly – that I might have sensed Roman soldiers marching into battle. Yes, that was exactly what it felt like, marching feet and dread.

Iain Bryson
Belfast, Northern Ireland

LETTERS

Dowsing

Picking up Ryan Shirlow’s challenge/invitation in his ongoing articles covering Arthur C Clarke’s TV series (**FT433:47-48**), I was shown the dowsing basics by a colleague’s father-in-law, Lol, back in the early 1990s. Since then, I’ve used the technique in occasional dowsing demonstrations and for practical searches for drain lines (very exotic) and the like. I use dowsing rods made from lengths of wire coathanger bent into an ‘L’ shape and a pendulum, the latter being a length of string with a lump of wood and some added plumber’s putty for weight.

The wire rods are used to chart water courses and I’d like to stress the word ‘courses’ as it doesn’t seem to matter all that much whether there’s running water at the time or not. That seems to underline Lol’s opinion that the dowser is picking up some sort of weak electrical field generated by the passage of water, rather than the water itself. The rods are used for the location of a watercourse, crossing when one if found, while the pendulum can be used to determine its depth below ground level. Here the pendulum goes from swinging back-and-forth to circular motion, the number of circles indicating the number of feet (I assume that’s because I was educated in imperial measure) beneath the pendulum. My tutor also reckoned that about six out of 10 people could get a result with the rods at first try, and that’s been my experience. Shirlow’s mention of the ideomotor effect is valid and I believe that this response is to a detection of a water course on some sort of subconscious level. At the risk of repetition, the dowser says to his or her-self: “When I cross a water course, these rods will cross” – and they do – but it’s the dowser that’s moving them (or a pendulum) at a micro-muscular level.

I would also concur with the suggestion that a subconscious reading of the surroundings may play a part and I would offer a personal example of that. Emboldened by my new-found dowsing abilities, I tried to expand my skills by using a pendulum to dowse for metals, primarily using pre-decimalisation pennies as a target.

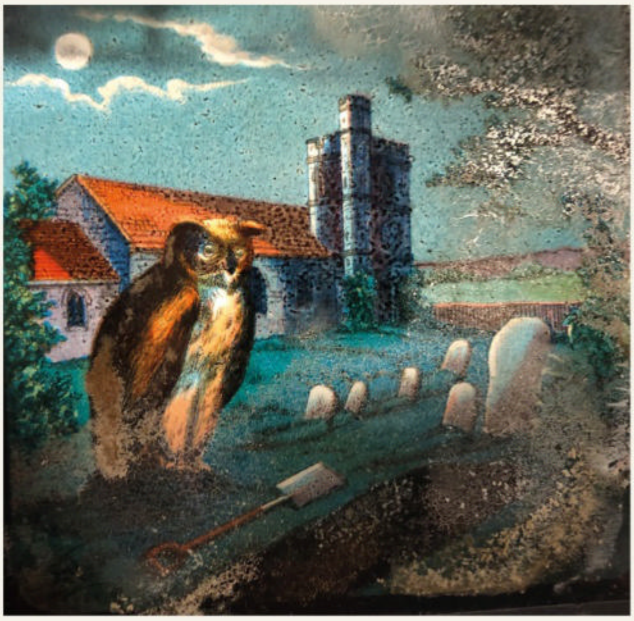
I was spending a couple of days with friends in Yorkshire when I revealed, during an evening pub visit, my new interest. When we returned to the family home it was suggested that a demonstration was in order and so Bob, my host, found a couple of suitable coins and set about pushing them into the finely trimmed lawn whilst his missus kept an eye on me indoors to ensure that I wasn’t spying on the procedure. The technique used here was to triangulate on the target, setting the pendulum in motion while standing in one corner of the area to be dowsed and slowly sweeping the other extended arm around until the pendulum moved into a circular path. The procedure was then repeated from the opposite corner and when the same result was achieved the place where the two lines crossed was the location. X marks the spot! To everybody’s surprise including, it must be said mine, this worked perfectly. Bob was keen on another demonstration but his wife, who was a regular churchgoer, decided that this was not going to happen and that was the end of that.

Many years later, during a discussion with a friend of the hows and whys of dowsing, the penny (pardon the pun) finally dropped. I’ve mentioned that the lawn was well manicured and the hubris resulting from my first success had been dimmed by a number of subsequent failures to dowse metals. Suppose, I suggested, that instead of dowsing some occult vibration from the coins, I had subconsciously noted traces of Bob’s footsteps in the grass, those stopping where he’d placed the target coins.

Dowsing for watercourses continues to result in (almost) a prize every time and there may, again, be an element of clues in the landscape, but a recent experience suggests that might not always be the case. The aforementioned Lol had mentioned dowsing for lines of force, which he thought related to the Earth’s magnetic field. Subsequently I’d read of so-called Earth energies and thought it an interesting project to try and dowse these. There was, as might be imagined, much advice online and some of this seemed contradictory, so I took the rods to the local park, a largely featureless area of grassed sports fields, and wandered up and down, north to south then east to west, trying to think ‘Earth energies’ and sticking small marker flags into the ground where I got a result. The trick is not to look back at the markers while doing this in order to avoid having a preconception of any resulting alignments. Having marked a dozen or so spots, I surveyed my work and saw a distinctive and familiar herringbone pattern: field drains. This was later confirmed by the park ranger showing me a plan of the site and its drainage.

One final thought on subconscious readings of things producing the ideomotor effect and moving the rods. I seem to recall that a good many years ago a British chap was prosecuted for marketing so-called explosive detectors to security forces in, I seem to remember, Iraq. [Editor’s note: This was James McCormick and his ADE 651: see **FT301:12, 302:8**]. These were an adaptation of a novelty golf ball detector that he had sold previously. As far as I can gather, this was a dowsing rod type of device and, as something with such spurious credentials being used in potentially life-and-death situations is obviously unacceptable, the prosecution was successful. The relevance here is that some of the individual users reckoned that the ‘detectors’ actually worked. Here, I suspect, we return to the instinct and ideomotor effect equation. I imagine that a good number of people working in these sorts of situations, from revenue and customs to security, rely to some extent on instinct to spot a ‘wrong ‘un’ and the rods simply manifest that reaction.

Andy Pearson
Birchwood, Cheshire



Graveyard owl

Recently, I purchased a box of antique glass slides – probably Victorian / Edwardian in date – at a car boot sale. One was this slide of a man-sized owl in a graveyard, staring into an empty grave. This immediately got me thinking of the Owlman of St Mawnan’s church in Cornwall, albeit I can’t reconcile the drawing of the church with the one at that location.

I would be interested to see what readers think – could such an image be an early depiction of this cryptid? From what I can see by Googling, there don’t seem to be any reports of Owlman before about the 1920s – perhaps the slide somehow inspired it!?

Mark Spurlock
Yatton, Somerset

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA
ForteanTimes

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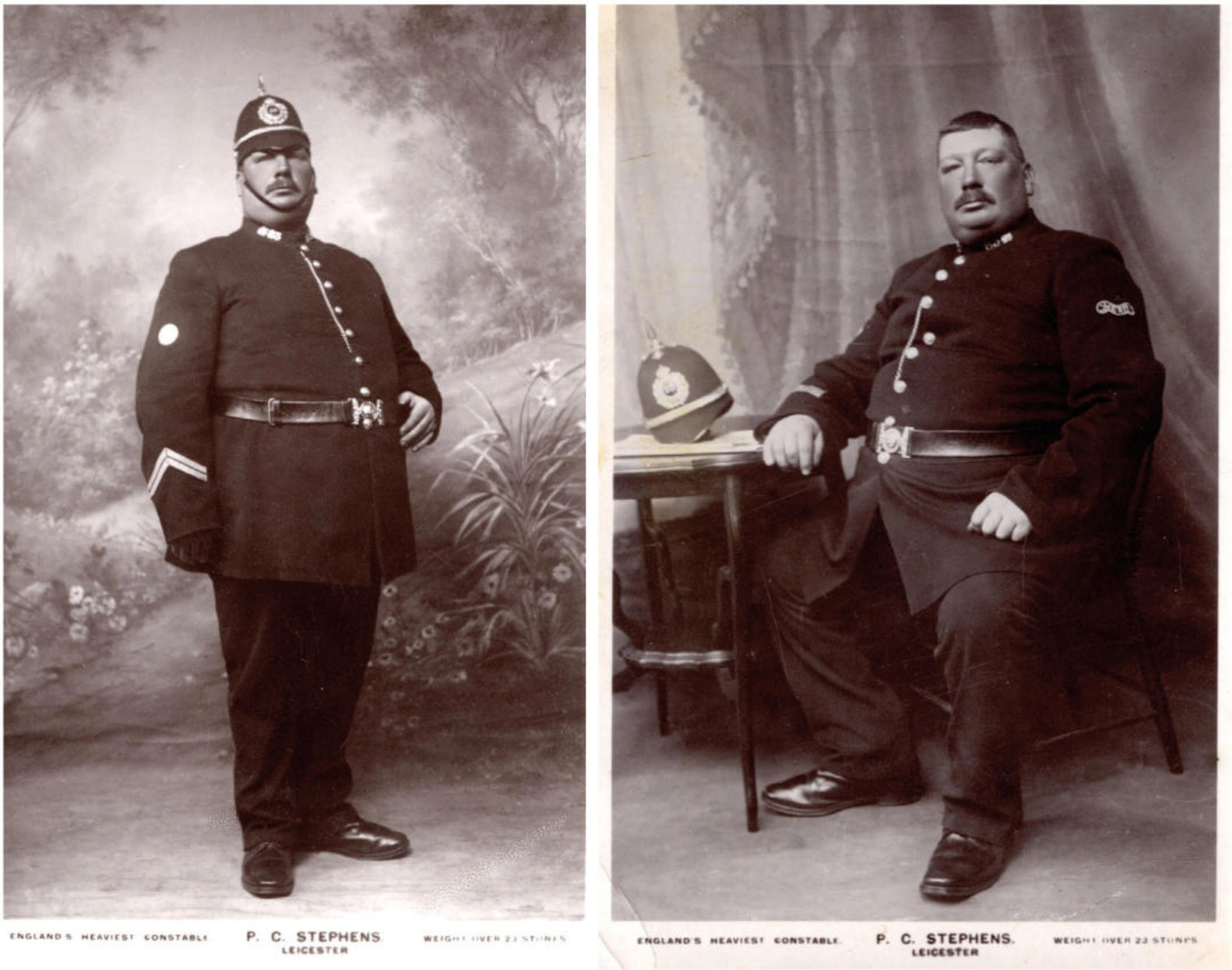
PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. In this month's pictorial blast from the past we meet a larger-than-life lawman and possible inspiration for 'The Laughing Policeman'

45. ENGLAND'S HEAVIEST CONSTABLE



ABOVE: Constable Stephens standing up – and sitting down. The second card was stamped and posted in April 1908.

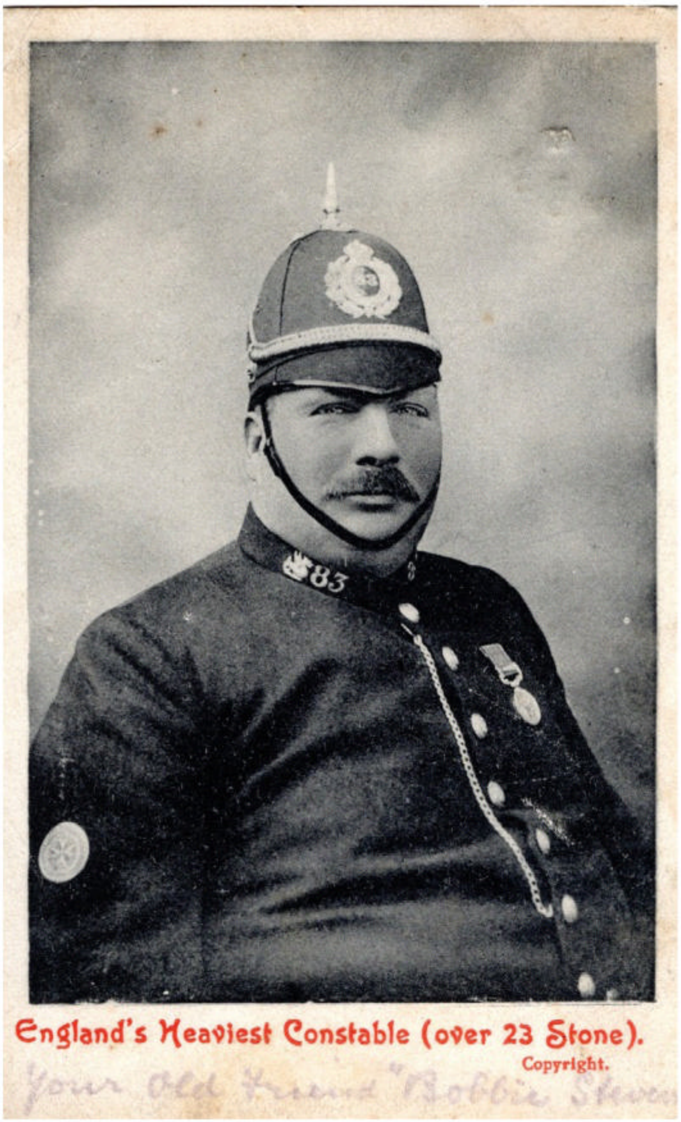
John William Stephens was born in Attleborough, Warwickshire, in or around the year 1860. In December 1877, he enlisted in the Royal Artillery at Portsmouth, serving abroad in Mauritius and Natal. During the Anglo-Zulu war, Stephens served in the Gatling gun battery with Colonel Evelyn Wood's flying column, seeing a good deal of action and being awarded a campaign medal. He remained in the Cape Colony until 1886, when he was posted home. He mustered out of the Royal Artillery in December 1889, after 12 years of service as a private soldier.

After leaving the army, Stephens became a police constable in Leicester. Since he was a hearty eater, and no friend of locomotion, his girth increased alarmingly. This sturdy police constable soon became recognised as one of the characters of Leicester; he was jovial and cheerful, and is said to have inspired the song 'The Laughing Policeman'. In Edwardian times, PC Stephens weighed in at over 24 stone, (152kg) and was Britain's heaviest policeman. He was still capable of patrolling his beat, and very popular locally. There were at least three picture postcards with his portrait,

> *Since he was a hearty eater and no friend of locomation, his girth increased alarmingly*

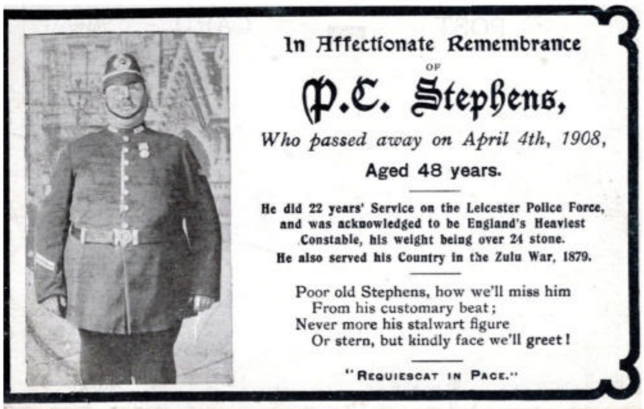
which enjoyed steady sales.

Unfortunately, the lifestyle of ‘Tubby’ Stephens was not conducive to a long and healthy existence: the famous police constable died in April 1908, aged just 48 years. There were dense crowds lining the entire route of the funeral cortege, from Stephens’s house in Cobden Street to the Welford Road Cemetery. An estimated 10,000 people turned out to show their respects for Britain’s heaviest police constable, a testimony to his popularity among the people of Leicester. There was a ‘Remembrance’ style postcard with a portrait of Stephens, and another card showing a cemetery scene.


England's Heaviest Constable (over 23 Stone).

Copyright.

Your Old Friend "Bobbie Stev


In Affectionate Remembrance

OF

P.C. Stephens,

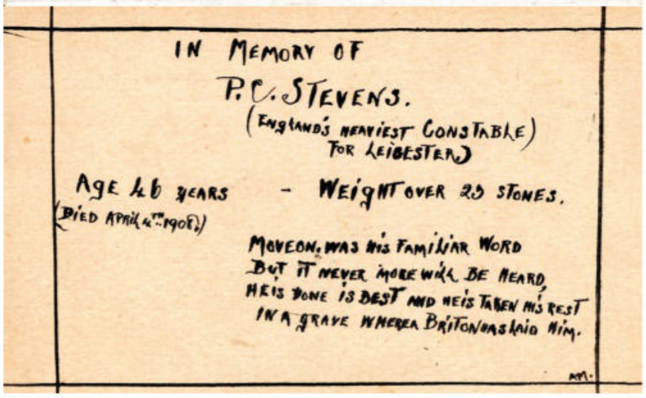
Who passed away on April 4th, 1908,

Aged 48 years.

He did 22 years' Service on the Leicester Police Force, and was acknowledged to be England's Heaviest Constable, his weight being over 24 stone. He also served his Country in the Zulu War, 1879.

Poor old Stephens, how we'll miss him
From his customary beat;
Never more his stalwart figure
Or stern, but kindly face we'll greet!

"REQUIESCAT IN PACE."


IN MEMORY OF

P.C. STEVENS.

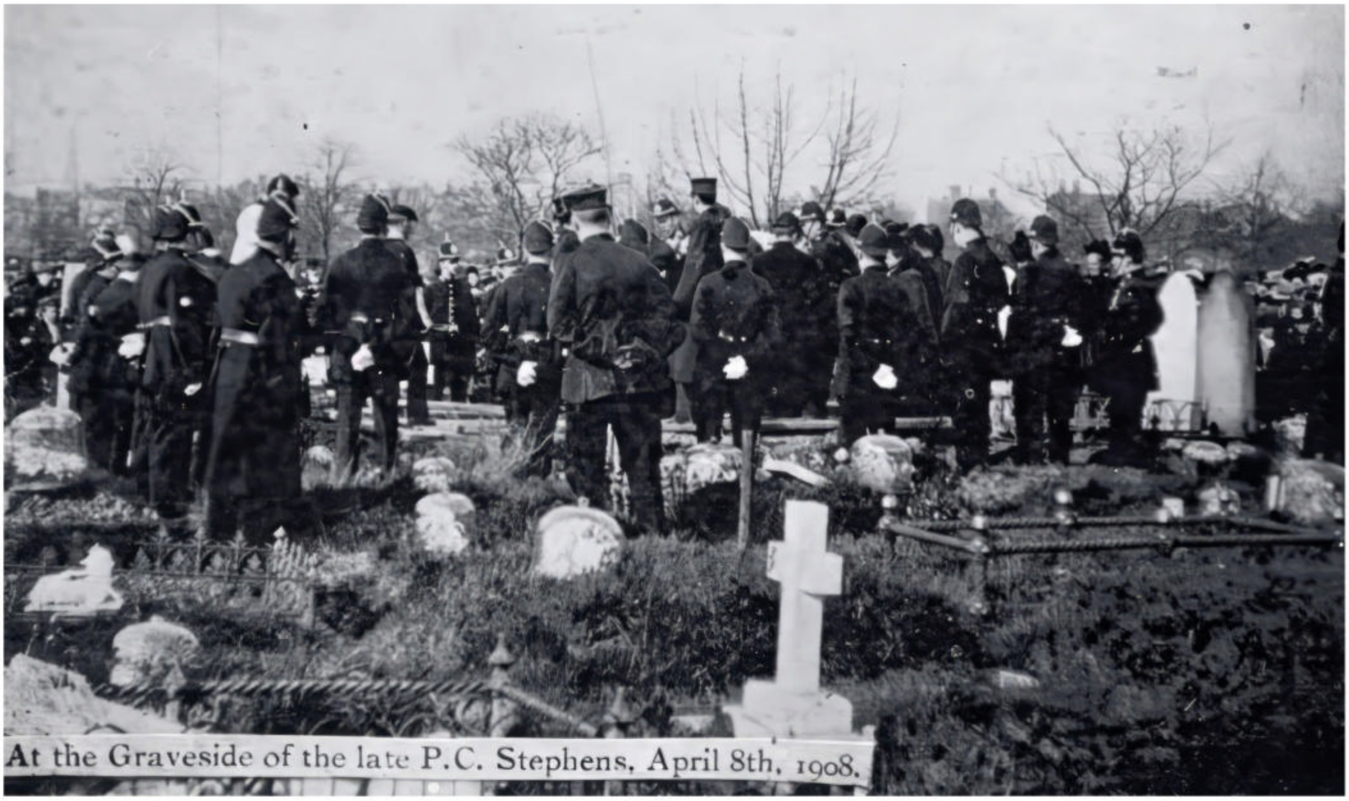
(ENGLAND'S HEAVIEST CONSTABLE
FOR LEIBESTER)

AGE 46 YEARS - WEIGHT OVER 23 STONES.

(DIED APRIL 4TH 1908.)

MOVEON. WAS HIS FAMILIAR WORD
BUT IT NEVER MORE WILL BE HEARD,
HE'S DONE IS BEST AND HE'S TAKEN HIS REST
IN A GRAVE WHERE A BRITON HAS LAID HIM.

MM.


At the Graveside of the late P.C. Stephens, April 8th, 1908.

ABOVE: A close-up of PC Stephens, a pair of remembrance cards and a postcard showing the scene at the graveside of the heavy constable on 8 April 1908.

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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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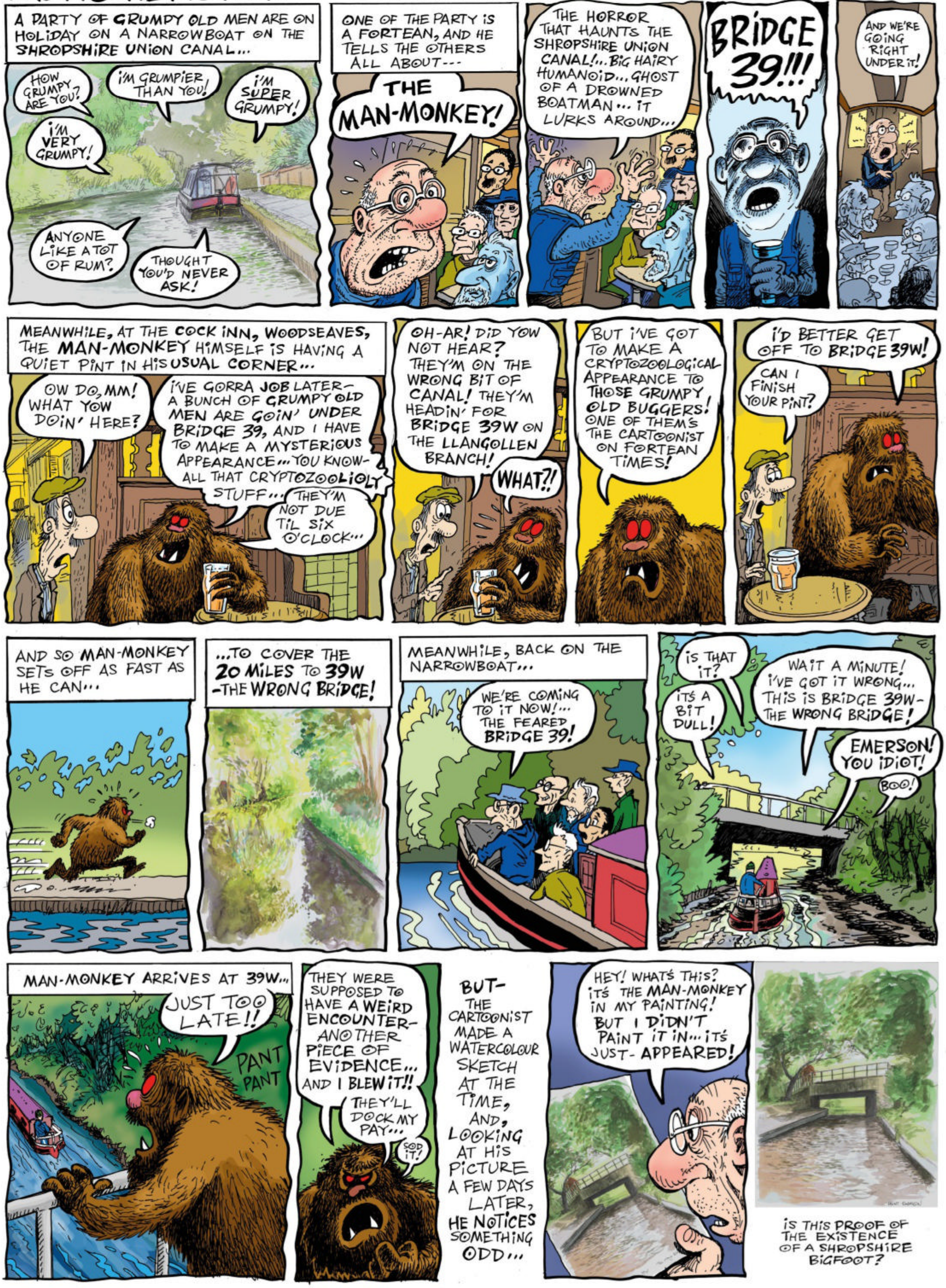
PHENOMENOMIX

THE WRONG BRIDGE

HUNT EMERSON


A PARTY OF GRUMPY OLD MEN ARE ON HOLIDAY ON A NARROWBOAT ON THE SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL...
HOW GRUMPY ARE YOU?
I'M GRUMPIER THAN YOU!
I'M SUPER GRUMPY!
I'M VERY GRUMPY!
ANYONE LIKE A TOT OF RUM?
THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK!
ONE OF THE PARTY IS A FORTEAN, AND HE TELLS THE OTHERS ALL ABOUT---
THE MAN-MONKEY!
THE HORROR THAT HAUNTS THE SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL!... BIG HAIRY HUMANOID... GHOST OF A DROWNED BOATMAN... IT LURKS AROUND...
BRIDGE 39!!!
AND WE'RE GOING RIGHT UNDER IT!
MEANWHILE, AT THE COCK INN, WOODSEAVES, THE MAN-MONKEY HIMSELF IS HAVING A QUIET PINT IN HIS USUAL CORNER...
OW DO, MM! WHAT YOW DOIN' HERE?
I'VE GORRA JOB LATER- A BUNCH OF GRUMPY OLD MEN ARE GOIN' UNDER BRIDGE 39, AND I HAVE TO MAKE A MYSTERIOUS APPEARANCE... YOU KNOW- ALL THAT CRYPTOZOOLIOLY STUFF...
THEY'M NOT DUE TIL SIX O'CLOCK...
OH-AR! DID YOW NOT HEAR? THEY'M ON THE WRONG BIT OF CANAL! THEY'M HEADIN' FOR BRIDGE 39W ON THE LLANGOLLEN BRANCH!
WHAT?!
BUT I'VE GOT TO MAKE A CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL APPEARANCE TO THOSE GRUMPY OLD BUGGERS! ONE OF THEM'S THE CARTOONIST ON FORTEAN TIMES!
I'D BETTER GET OFF TO BRIDGE 39W!
CAN I FINISH YOUR PINT?
AND SO MAN-MONKEY SETS OFF AS FAST AS HE CAN...
...TO COVER THE 20 MILES TO 39W -THE WRONG BRIDGE!
MEANWHILE, BACK ON THE NARROWBOAT...
WE'RE COMING TO IT NOW!... THE FEARED BRIDGE 39!
IS THAT IT?
IT'S A BIT DULL!
WAIT A MINUTE! I'VE GOT IT WRONG... THIS IS BRIDGE 39W- THE WRONG BRIDGE!
EMERSON! YOU IDIOT!
BOO!
MAN-MONKEY ARRIVES AT 39W...
JUST TOO LATE!!
PANT PANT
THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE A WEIRD ENCOUNTER- ANOTHER PIECE OF EVIDENCE... AND I BLEW IT!!
THEY'LL DOCK MY PAY...
SOD IT!
BUT- THE CARTOONIST MADE A WATERCOLOUR SKETCH AT THE TIME, AND, LOOKING AT HIS PICTURE A FEW DAYS LATER, HE NOTICES SOMETHING ODD...
HEY! WHAT'S THIS? IT'S THE MAN-MONKEY IN MY PAINTING! BUT I DIDN'T PAINT IT IN... IT'S JUST- APPEARED!
HUNT EMERSON
IS THIS PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF A SHROPSHIRE BIGFOOT?

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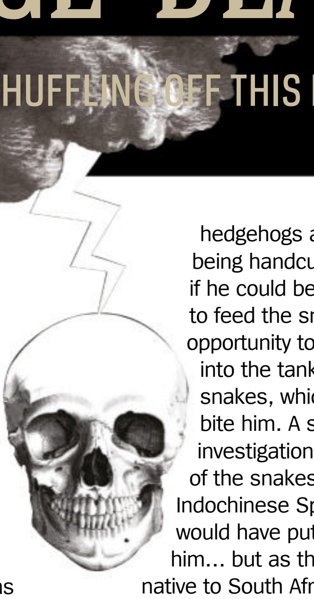
FORTEAN TIMES 448
ON SALE 8 AUG 2024

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Schools in the village of Souffelweyersheim in eastern France were locked down in a terror alert after two schoolgirls aged seven and 11 were stabbed by a man outside their primary school. The girls only suffered minor injuries and police swiftly detained a 30-year-old man. While they did so, though, the application of security measures in the nearby secondary school caused considerable panic, with pupils reportedly believing there was an armed killer in the school. During this panic, extreme fear caused a 14-year-old girl to undergo “an episode of very high stress that led to a heart attack” and although, according to an education spokesperson, she “was rescued by teachers who were very fast to call the fire department [who provide ambulances in France], she died at the end of the afternoon”. Local resident Deborah Wendling said: “Whereas in the primary school they made it more like a game, perhaps here it was a little too direct.” *S.Mail (Queensland), 21 Apr 2024.*

Police in Oaxaca, Mexico, are treating the deaths of four men and one woman in the state as a group suicide after they were found dead from poisoning. The group, aged between 18 and 55, were related, and their bodies were found together in a house in Oaxaca with no outward signs of injury. The family were adherents of the syncretic Santeria faith, which started in Cuba and blends Roman Catholic traditions with Yoruba spiritual practices originating from Africa. Iván García Alvarez, the Oaxaca state police chief, said that he believed the victims had mixed a toxic potion, then drank it “to acquire some kind of powers,” adding that “the only thing that happened was they died of poisoning.” Police did not know which substances the fatal potion had contained, but noted that Santeria rituals elsewhere in Mexico had involved extracts from toxic plants like jimson weed, also known as Devil’s Trumpet, and venom from the highly poisonous Colorado River toad. *[AP] 1 May 2024.*

Following his arrest for burglary and theft in Hennenman, near Bloemfontein, South Africa, police discovered that security guard Marius Joubert, 28, was also keeping a large menagerie of illegally imported exotic animals in extremely poor conditions. Police searching his home found more than 60 snakes, as well as a crocodile, iguanas, monitors, tarantulas, hedgehogs and ferrets. Despite being handcuffed, Joubert asked if he could be released temporarily to feed the snakes and took the opportunity to plunge his hands into the tanks of two venomous snakes, which provoked both to bite him. A source close to the investigation said, “We know one of the snakes that bit him was an Indochinese Spitting Cobra, which would have put a shitload of venom in him... but as the spitting cobra is not native to South Africa there was no anti-venom.” It took nine hours from the bite for Joubert to collapse and then another three hours for the snake’s venom to kill him. “The venom is both a neurotoxin and a cytotoxin, which means it shut down his lungs and suffocated him and also caused severe bleeding and destroyed his body tissues. It was an extremely painful and horrific way to end his life,”said a police spokesperson. *mirror.co.uk, 9 Apr 2024.*

Shenting Guo, 32, was in hysterics when she called authorities in Grand Junction, Colorado, saying she “believed her boyfriend was dead, but couldn’t provide a reason why”. They gave her CPR instructions over the phone while police were dispatched to the scene. On arrival at the hotel room, officers say they saw “a bed with a large amount of blood smeared on it”, an “upset” woman and “a naked male lying on his back with his feet under the bed” who was unresponsive. They “noticed the male’s penis appeared to be cut off” and that he had “trauma in his genitalia” and a stab wound to his leg. Guo told police “to arrest her now” and admitted having stabbed her boyfriend because he “wouldn’t let her sleep” and said “that she killed him and she cut off his penis”. A search of the room revealed a knife under the bed and the victim’s “severed penis in the trash can” in the bathroom. Asked why she severed her partner’s penis, Guo explained she did it “to see if [he] would wake up” and “even told him she was going to cut it off” beforehand, but he didn’t respond. She also admitted using two different knives, one to stab him, and a second to sever his penis. The hotel manager reported that she had heard a man “yelling for help”, although when she approached the door, she heard the pair talking calmly and a male voice asking for paper towels so didn’t intervene “and eventually walked away”. Guo has been charged with murder in the second degree while in the heat of passion and domestic violence. *toofab.com, 17 May 2024.*

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